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Mr Andrew Wilson  
Executive Headteacher  
Southbroom St James CE Academy  
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Wiltshire  
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Dear Mr Wilson

**Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Southbroom St James CE Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 20–21 September 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in December 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

**Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, the head of school and the assistant headteacher. Together, we observed pupils in classrooms and spoke to them about their learning. Work in books from both the current and previous academic years was analysed. I had meetings with middle leaders, members of staff and three governors, including the chair of the local governing board. I also met the chief executive officer and school improvement director from the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. I had discussions with pupils and heard some of them read. I also attended an assembly.

## **Context**

A period of staff turbulence has followed the previous inspection. There have been changes in leadership with a new head of school being appointed in January 2017 and two middle leaders taking up posts from September 2017. Additionally, a number of teaching staff have left the school and, during the spring and summer terms, this led to a large proportion of pupils being taught by temporary teachers. Staffing is now stable with four new teachers having joined the school in September 2017.

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

Together with the head of school, you have wasted no time in bringing about improvements. This has led to a significant change in the school's culture and put learning firmly at the heart of its work. This has been noticed by parents. Those spoken to during my visit were overwhelmingly positive about the school, describing it as being unrecognisable when pupils returned in September.

Effective improvement plans are in place. These are ambitious in their timescales and precisely focused on the areas identified at the last inspection. The local governing board is stringently holding you to account for the implementation of these plans. Governors have upskilled themselves to strengthen their ability to test the information they are given about pupils' outcomes. For example, they have carried out joint learning walks and scrutinies of pupils' work with the improvement director from the academy trust.

Supported by the trust, you have been unyielding in ensuring that all inadequate teaching is eliminated. An extensive support programme continues to improve the quality of teaching and this is beginning to have a measurable impact on pupils' outcomes. The newly appointed middle leaders have brought expertise and knowledge to the school. Although only having been in post for a matter of weeks, they demonstrate an accurate understanding of the challenges they face in raising standards in their subjects.

The trust is providing the school with an effective mix of support and challenge. Through regular improvement meetings and reviews, they are checking the progress of the school's improvement journey. They hold leaders and governors to account for the improvements being made, and have set the school ambitious targets for pupils' outcomes at the end of this academic year. The trust has also brokered external support through a local teaching school and a consultant headteacher. The impact of these actions has been positive in securing leadership and raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Both you and the head of school demonstrate a secure understanding of what is needed to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching and, consequently, pupils' outcomes. You have high expectations and expect the same from staff and

pupils. The head of school has put in place a set of rigorous non-negotiables to add consistency to the school's practices. However, you both recognise that these need to be closely monitored, especially given the number of newly appointed teachers starting this term.

Teachers have been given effective support and clear guidance to ensure that they help pupils to catch up quickly. For example, your new, structured calculation policy has led to a collective understanding of the teaching sequence required to develop pupils' calculation and computation skills. Similarly, the introduction of levelled challenges has better equipped teachers to match work to pupils' needs.

Pupils told me they like the way they are allowed to choose the level of challenge. Observations of learning showed that pupils generally make the correct choice and take the opportunity to stretch themselves. As one pupil told me, 'If we choose the easy one we won't learn as much. We like to be challenged.' You recognise, however, that there are still some inconsistencies in how this approach to differentiation is managed across different classes and year groups. You also recognise that careful thought needs to be given when designing tasks which fulfil the mastery element of the national curriculum. For example, in mathematics, pupils of all abilities need to be given opportunities to reason. In reading, pupils need activities which require them to use higher-level comprehension skills.

The last inspection identified the need for leaders to ensure that assessment information was accurate and being used to inform teachers' planning. As a result of staff training and extensive moderation, there is now a renewed confidence in the quality of information. This is enabling you to hold teachers to account for pupils' outcomes as well as to set ambitious progress targets. You recognise that the next step is to check closely the progress being made by key groups, for example disadvantaged pupils, the most able and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Compared with previous years, outcomes in the 2017 key stage 2 national tests showed significant improvements, particularly in reading and mathematics. However, outcomes in other year groups are improving at a slower rate and the proportions of pupils working at the standards expected for their age are still significantly below national averages.

In mathematics, staff demonstrate a developing subject knowledge, although, at times, the use of mathematical language lacks precision. The ambition that all pupils in the school should be working within the expectations for their age is beginning to raise outcomes for all pupils, especially those with lower prior attainment. Leaders have supported teachers in identifying the precise learning steps required to enable pupils to fill gaps in their understanding.

Leaders have raised expectations in reading and pupils are now reading regularly both at home and in school. A reorganisation of the school's reading scheme is

ensuring that pupils are now reading books which more closely match their ability. Leaders have also ensured that, in lessons, pupils are exposed to high-quality texts which are appropriate to their ages. However, you recognise that the school's teaching of reading needs to be reviewed to ensure that greater numbers of pupils are able to demonstrate higher-order reading skills.

A more structured approach to the teaching of writing is enabling pupils to develop their skills and apply these across a range of different genres. Pupils enjoy the weekly opportunities for extended writing and there is evidence of progress being made over time. At the time of my visit, there was some evidence of extended writing across the curriculum, for example historical recounts. The head of school has already put plans in place to develop extended writing over the coming terms.

The teaching of spelling and, in particular, phonics, remains weak. There are deficiencies in the expertise and subject knowledge among staff. This is limiting the school's ability to support pupils who come into Year 3 with a phonics understanding below that expected for their age, as well as those in other year groups with gaps in their knowledge. As a priority, leaders need to provide the training and structure to enable staff in all year groups to identify and address weaknesses in pupils' phonics understanding.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing board, the director of education for the Diocese of Salisbury, the regional schools commissioner, the chief executive officer and chair of the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust and the director of children's services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Dyer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**