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Mrs Jackie Chalk
Headteacher
St George's Church of England Primary School, Semington
Pound Lane
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Dear Mrs Chalk

Special measures monitoring inspection of St George's Church of England Primary School, Semington

Following my visit to your school on 13–14 December 2017, 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 school'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 April 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 improvement plan is fit for purpose. However, given the strong progress made up to this time, you need to ensure that the next phase of improvement is fully planned, with the relevant professional development matched to priorities.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing board and the chief executive of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Salisbury,

the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2017.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - securing leadership capacity in the school so that leaders are not overly reliant on external support
 - implementing a consistent and accurate system for assessing and tracking pupils' learning
 - ensuring that checks on teaching are thorough and provide precise and timely guidance on what teachers need to do to improve
 - ensuring that governors know the impact teaching has on pupils' progress and more rigorously check on the school's performance, holding leaders fully to account for the progress of all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - implementing recent plans to ensure that there is adequate curriculum provision
 - ensuring that provision in the early years meets the needs of the children
 - improving the level of communication with parents.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment quickly by ensuring that teachers:
 - raise expectations of what all groups of pupils can achieve to improve rates of pupils' progress
 - accurately assess what pupils can and cannot do and use this knowledge to eradicate any gaps in learning across the curriculum
 - increase their subject knowledge, especially about mathematics, so that they can plan the next steps in pupils' learning effectively
 - provide pupils with the support and guidance they need to make progress, in particular for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve the early years provision by ensuring that:
 - assessment is used effectively to ensure that learning and provision build on what children know, can do and understand, so that children make rapid progress
 - the learning activities both indoors and outdoors are stimulating and promote children's learning and development.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how to improve this aspect of leadership and management.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 13–14 December 2017

Evidence

The inspector worked closely with the headteacher across the range of inspection activities. As part of this, he met with parents and pupils to seek their views, as well as conducting learning walks to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Together, the inspector and headteacher scrutinised samples of work in pupils' workbooks to evaluate progress and the accuracy of teachers' assessments. In addition, the inspector met with representatives of the White Horse Federation (WHF), the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and representatives of the governing body. The inspection also scrutinised key documentation, such as the school improvement plan, performance management information and the administration around mandatory safeguarding procedures.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the day-to-day running of the school, including the removal of the previous governing body which has subsequently been replaced by the governing body of Seend Church of England Primary. This is a school rated as 'good' by Ofsted in April 2017. The headteacher of Seend also started working in St George's from September 2017. There has also been a key change in those providing long-term support and challenge at trust level. During the summer 2017, the WHF stepped in and assumed the role of strategic lead. In so doing, the chief executive of the WHF became the interim chief executive of the Academy Trust of Melksham (ATOM).

The school has been reorganised from a three- to four-class structure. There have also been wholesale changes in staffing, meaning that all class teachers are new from September 2017. There is also a newly appointed senior teacher providing useful support to the headteacher. The majority of teaching assistants are also new.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The changes in leadership and management at all levels are having a strong impact to improve the school. New leaders are effective. They have quickly understood the needs of the school and have taken rapid action to start improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. In particular, the headteacher has shown the determination, passion and resilience to take the right decisions on behalf of the pupils. She has immediately prioritised improving teaching and learning, for example in introducing daily lessons for phonics, reading and mathematics with clear non-negotiables. As a result, pupils are rediscovering a love of learning in a safe, engaging and supportive environment. Pupils recognise this and speak highly of the impact of recent changes in the school. For example, they unanimously agreed when the inspector was told, 'I feel like I'm in a new school

because it's changed so much!' Parents who met with the inspector agreed with a majority of 94% who now say that they would recommend St George's. Parents clearly articulate how recent changes are impacting positively, saying that teachers 'bring learning to life'.

The headteacher, senior teacher and SENCo work effectively at the heart of the school's work. They have been quick to understand the needs of the pupils and already know them well. Consequently, they have put in the right processes and are supporting teachers and teaching assistants to help pupils make progress to start closing gaps that have occurred due to previous weaknesses in teaching. However, subject leaders' plans in English and mathematics are not complete, which means that there is some vulnerability for the next round of improvement, especially where staff professional development is not well accounted for. The SENCo has ensured that all pupils who need an individual support plan have had this reviewed and agreed by parents. However, the impact of this has not yet been checked or evaluated closely enough. Some objectives are not sufficiently precise, or intended actions have not been delivered consistently in daily teaching and provision, which is slowing the progress of some pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

Leaders are ensuring that the most urgent matters are being tackled through the school's improvement plan. This is fit for purpose and focuses on the issues raised through the last inspection. For example, leaders have been proactive in improving the environment for children in the early years foundation stage. This area is being transformed to improve the children's play, enjoyment and learning. In addition, baseline assessments have been completed to provide clear reference points for teachers and parents in the early years. However, the quality of the outdoor provision is not yet strong in promoting early literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Also, the provision and physical environment are not organised to promote children's independence well enough, which is critical to their personal, social and emotional development.

A pupil premium review was undertaken in September 2017. This has rightly identified that school leaders, including governors, must ensure that an effective strategy for disadvantaged pupils is fully implemented and rigorously evaluated to diminish differences for them. The strategy to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils is not yet impacting consistently well enough for those receiving additional funding through the pupil premium grant.

A governance review was completed in July/August 2017. This was commissioned through ATOM and took a 'trust-wide' view of the schools. As an independent report, it did not take enough account of the needs of St George's or evaluate its unique context well enough. However, the new governing body has a good understanding of what needs to be done and is being well supported by the WHF to apply its skills and knowledge to this new and differing context from Seend. The school is still relying strongly on the direct intervention of the trust, so the local

governing body is not yet taking full and decisive action as it 'finds its feet'. For example, governors have not checked or evaluated the impact of their work or strategies through visits to the school. Governors, leaders and trustees recognise this and are in the process of delivering training to bolster the skills of local governors as a driving force in the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Since the previous inspection, the new teachers and teaching assistants have settled well and established a positive ethos in the school. Teachers take the time to plan lessons that excite and motivate the pupils. For example, Year 6 pupils have written interesting biographies about Anne Boleyn in their topic work. Relationships in the classroom are strong, and pupils are showing an appetite and willingness to learn. Pupils described behaviour in lessons in the past as 'wild', but they are now settled, keen and focused. Teachers and pupils alike have raised their expectations with a palpable sense of a 'fresh-feel' in the school. Pupils are aware that there are gaps in their knowledge but are motivated to catch up.

Teachers have been effective in reviewing the achievement of pupils across the school. They know the pupils well and already have accurate assessments in each class for reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers use this information to help them plan their lessons and to match work to the pupils' different needs. This is rapidly improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, there are some occasions when teaching is still not focused well enough on particular groups, for example the most able, who repeat work they can already do. This is slowing the progress of some pupils who are capable of achieving more.

Teachers check pupils' learning and use a variety of strategies to help them if they are struggling or stuck. For example, teachers deploy teaching assistants or additional support before the next lesson. Pupils receive useful feedback that is immediate and timely, so that they can evaluate how well they are doing. However, teachers do not sufficiently check the quality of learning in other groups led by teaching assistants. This means that they do not intervene or help pupils in guided sessions when there is a need, for example in mathematics to secure pupils' understanding of fractions or to identify misconceptions that may be being taught. There are some occasions when teachers and teaching assistants inadvertently teach misconceptions in mathematics lessons. As a result, pupils are confused or are not being well supported for future mathematics learning and development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders' new systems and revised expectations of pupils' conduct, learning and behaviour are supporting pupils well. Pupils are proud of the school and show respect to each other in lessons and when they are moving or playing around the school. Pupils feel valued by staff and are keen to make contributions to the school, for example through the school council or having their efforts acknowledged in the

'gold book'. Leaders correctly identified that improving pupils' behaviour, morale and attitudes was central to improving other aspects of their schooling. Leaders have taken the right steps to ensure that pupils feel happy, supported and want to learn. Since September, this has also been reflected in pupils' attendance, which has improved significantly from below to being above the national average, especially for boys. The numbers of pupils who have persistently high absence have also fallen. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still adrift of their counterparts and below the national average.

Leaders' strategies to improve pupils' attitudes and behaviour through the school's values (linked to the 'gems') are effective. Pupils speak confidently about how their learning is enhanced through developing resilience and a 'growth mindset'. This has also been communicated well to parents, who mentioned this to the inspector. The school community is establishing a supportive culture where pupils are strongly encouraged to focus on what they can do and build from there.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have continued to ensure that safeguarding is the highest priority. Systems and processes are fully compliant with regulations, so that pre-employment checks on staff and subsequent training are effective. Issues relating to administration have been resolved, and parents no longer voice concerns over safeguarding. There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff know what to do and how to respond to pupils, and understand that it is the responsibility of all. Recently, the headteacher has rigorously checked historic staffing appointments, which has led to action being taken under the school's disciplinary policy. Together with other leaders, she is tenacious in challenging other agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils are well cared for and protected.

Pupils say that they feel safe. The older pupils say that the improving behaviour is a big change from the past. They have confidence in adults who work in the school and trust them to help in a range of situations. Pupils know how to stay safe in a variety of situations, such as when working online and what to do in the event of a fire.

Outcomes for pupils

Despite the small cohort sizes, pupils previously have not made the progress of which they are capable and have left the school underprepared for the next stage in their learning. Progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 also showed that too few pupils made enough progress, and there were declines in both reading and writing. In key stage 1, the 2017 results have been shown to be overly generous and inaccurate. Therefore, leaders and teachers have set about re-evaluating and assessing the pupils. This has proven to be the right course of action. Assessment information is now reliable, and teachers' notes are well supported by evidence in the pupils' workbooks. As a result, teachers and leaders are now in a position to accurately check and account for pupils' progress at regular intervals. However, there is still more to do to ensure that teachers make

the best use of assessment information and in leaders' use and analysis of key information for particular pupils and vulnerable groups, including disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils' workbooks show a marked improvement in the quality of work since September 2017. Progress is clearly discernible in all classes, for example in the sophistication, composition and style in writing. Pupils are producing work of a higher standard, with increasing proportions working towards age-appropriate content or age-related expectations. This is also exemplified in talking with pupils, for example in Year 2, where pupils are able to explain how to add pairs of two-digit numbers and what digits in the number '25' represent. However, due to the previous legacy of underperformance, there are still persistent gaps in pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. In particular, pupils still lack confidence and an ability to spell, punctuate or use a rich vocabulary to read or write. In mathematics, pupils do not know or recall basic number facts and arithmetic well and do not use these effectively to solve problems or reason.

Following further poor results in 2017 in the Year 1 phonics screening check and early years foundation stage outcomes (good level of development), leaders have targeted early phonics, including reading and writing in the early years and key stage 1. Pupils are now benefiting from a daily programme to improve their phonic knowledge and skills. This is beginning to have some impact, for example a group of lower-attaining boys were being well supported to read words including 'hump', 'damp' and 'pink'. They are starting to use and apply this knowledge in writing to form simple words and phrases. Consequently, pupils who have gaps in their knowledge are being targeted to catch up quickly. However, weak subject knowledge of some adults leading phonics sessions did not promote the right level of challenge or support for the pupils, including the most able, including modelling how to pronounce key sounds.

The most able and disadvantaged pupils remain two key groups whose outcomes have been particularly compromised historically. Workbooks show that, along with other lower-attaining pupils who need to catch up, they are starting to make gains. Work since September 2017 shows increasing demands and challenge, which the pupils are relishing and rising to. However, attainment gaps in basic knowledge are still commonplace across the whole school and still require intensive work to remedy.

External support

The headteacher works effectively with trustees and directors of the WHF. Together, they have agreed on essential packages of support and taken action to ensure that pupils will enjoy higher-quality teaching and provision. For example, an additional teacher has been sourced for Year 2 (since October 2017), which is enabling this group of eight pupils to benefit from well-focused tasks matched to their needs. In addition, the trust has brokered further training opportunities, such

as participation on a phonics project (through the Brook Valley Teaching School Alliance) and providing support for staff and governors in using their assessment and tracking software. These are well directed so that, for example, a daily phonics programme is now being delivered across the early years and key stage 1, and teachers are using assessment information to inform their decisions.