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Mrs Susan Dench
Executive Headteacher
The West Grantham Academy St John's
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Lincolnshire
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Dear Mrs Dench

Special measures monitoring inspection of The West Grantham Academy St John's

Following my visit with Karen Lewis, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 13–14 March 2018, 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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 academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the director of education for the Diocese of Lincoln, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lawson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Tackle weaknesses in the school's arrangements to protect pupils and keep them safe urgently, by:
 - ensuring that the leaders responsible for this aspect of the school's work have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to carry out their roles effectively
 - ensuring that records of concerns about pupils' well-being are detailed, thorough and properly maintained, so that leaders can be certain that appropriate action is taken to protect the pupils at risk of harm
 - ensuring that school leaders inform the appropriate agencies when pupils who are at risk are identified and that they devise clear systems to make sure that concerns are acted on quickly and effectively
 - tackling aggressive and overly boisterous behaviour and the high incidence of bullying effectively, so that pupils feel safe and protected when they are at school
 - ensuring that the curriculum adheres to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 by promoting tolerance towards people with protected characteristics
 - ensuring that governors maintain proper oversight of the effectiveness of the school's arrangements to safeguard children from harm and to promote tolerance towards others.
- Strengthen all aspects of leadership, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels have the knowledge, skills and understanding to carry out their roles effectively
 - ensuring that roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear, so that leaders, staff and governors understand precisely who is responsible for what
 - increasing the accuracy of leaders' evaluation of teaching
 - ensuring that rigorous systems are in place to inform the school's own self-evaluation and future school improvement planning.
- Improve outcomes rapidly for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, by:
 - ensuring that the additional funding provided to support pupils who have additional needs is allocated to those for whom it is intended, including children who are looked after
 - ensuring that the leaders responsible have the knowledge, understanding, skills and authority to carry out their roles effectively
 - strengthening the school's systems for identifying pupils who have special

educational needs and/or disabilities, so that they can quickly be given the support that they need

- tracking the impact of additional spending rigorously, so that leaders have a strong understanding of the difference it is making to pupils' achievement and so that further action can be taken if achievement remains low
- increasing the impact of teaching assistants in lessons, so that they consistently make a demonstrable contribution to pupils' achievement.
- Improve pupils' attendance, particularly the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school.
- Ensure that leaders tackle lateness more effectively, so that pupils routinely arrive to school on time.
- Improve the quality of teaching and thereby improve outcomes for all groups of pupils, including the most able pupils, by:
 - holding teachers to account more effectively for the quality of their teaching and the achievement of the different groups of pupils they teach
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and how pupils should behave
 - improving teachers' skills in adapting learning to meet the needs of different groups of pupils, including least-able pupils, disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and most-able pupils
 - strengthening transition arrangements between the early years and key stage 1, so that the gains children make in the early years are not lost in Year 1
 - equipping teachers with the skills necessary to make effective use of classroom assistants and ensuring that they do so consistently.

An external review of governance should be undertaken, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 13 March 2018 to 14 March 2018

Evidence

The inspectors met with the executive headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, senior and middle leaders, teaching assistants and other staff. Inspectors met with three members of the board of trustees, including the chair, and a representative of the local authority. They met with parents at both sites and with pupils informally during the school day, as well as in a meeting with a group of pupils. Discussions explored a wide range of subjects, including safeguarding arrangements and evidence in relation to the areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2017.

Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes in a total of 15 lessons, as well as in small groups of pupils for the teaching of phonics. Some lessons were observed jointly with the acting deputy headteacher. During these visits, the inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils to evaluate the quality of their learning. Inspectors also examined, with school leaders, pupils' work in a sample of their books. Inspectors scrutinised a variety of documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' attainment and progress, staff performance and leaders' plans for improvement. Inspectors also considered the range and quality of information provided on the school's website.

Context

The trust has appointed a new substantive headteacher, who is due to take up post in September 2018. The acting headteacher was not available during the inspection.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school has continued to improve since the last monitoring visit in September 2017. Leaders, other staff and the governing board demonstrate drive and ambition to improve the school. For the reasons detailed below, however, the pace of improvement has not been as rapid as it could be.

Leaders have established many new systems and procedures in a range of areas to help the school move forward. Senior leaders and the trust recognise that the school now needs to act with greater urgency to ensure that their initiatives have the maximum impact on pupils' learning and the school's development.

Leaders have established a system for checking and reviewing pupils' progress. Examination of pupils' work, however, shows that the school's assessment of pupils' progress is not accurate. As a result, the school's self-evaluation and plans for

improvement are not as effective as they should be. The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose because it clearly identifies the required priorities for improvement. However, leaders and the trust have not ensured that it is sufficiently focused. This means that they are not holding leaders and other staff to account effectively to help bring about more rapid progress.

Leaders have been effective in further strengthening safeguarding procedures. There is an improving culture of safeguarding. Most parents I spoke with were positive about the school and said that their children were safe. The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The trust has ensured that leaders on both school sites have the skills that they need. There is a cohesive approach to managing the arrangements for safeguarding. Staff receive regular training in child protection, including in the government's 'Prevent' strategy. Leaders have ensured that all staff understand the procedures for reporting concerns. The school's record of recruitment checks and recruitment processes are rigorous. School systems for recording concerns are now detailed, well organised and thorough. Leaders take timely action when they have concerns about pupils' welfare. They secure the involvement of external agencies where this is required.

Leaders continue to build on the strengths of the school identified at the last visit. The teaching of phonics in the early years and key stage 1 has further improved. A new 'reading leader' role has been established and a focused programme of support is in place to support pupils who are not secure in their phonics. The support from the local authority has been effective in further improving leadership and teaching in the early years.

Some leaders have had training for their specific areas of responsibility. Leaders have not, however, sufficiently strengthened middle and subject leadership. Middle and subject leaders have not received the relevant training that they need. This means that they are not yet effective in leading wider, rapid and measurable improvements in pupils' attainment and progress.

The minutes of meetings of the governing board show that governors ask challenging questions of leaders about pupils' progress and about the progress of different groups of pupils. The experienced chair and other members of the board understand their role to support and challenge leaders. They recognise that more rapid improvement is possible. They acknowledge that the board has not ensured that the findings from the previous visit have been fully acted upon. School improvement plans are not sufficiently focused. As a result, the governing board is not as effective as it could be in holding the school to account.

The review of the use of the pupil premium has taken place since my last visit. Leaders and the governing board have acted upon the findings and there has been clear progress in this area. The school's pupil premium strategy and review is now published on its website. Leaders have raised the profile of disadvantaged pupils and ensured that all teachers are aware of the needs of this group of pupils. These

pupils now generally receive appropriate support. The 'priority readers' initiative, for example, ensures that disadvantaged pupils receive focused support to improve their reading skills. Leaders and the governing board, however, do not check the attainment and progress of these and other pupils rigorously enough. This means that they cannot ensure that the funding has the maximum impact in accelerating pupils' progress.

The coordinator for provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities has established a system to ensure that pupils with additional needs are identified quickly. An overview of the provision for these pupils is now in place and some staff have received relevant training. A system to track the progress of these pupils is now also in place. Leaders, however, do not yet have a clear overview or analysis of the impact of their actions on improving pupils' progress. Leaders are clear that this is an area for continuing development.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching is improving. Work to improve teachers' questioning skills has had some success. Where teaching is stronger, teachers skilfully extend pupils' thinking through carefully chosen questions. Work has continued to improve the quality of teaching of mathematics. Teachers often promote pupils' understanding well with the use of visual imagery or well-chosen resources. In some classes, pupils are effectively taught how to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills. This is not consistent, however. Teachers now ask pupils to check the quality of their writing more carefully. The development of a project-based curriculum is effective in helping pupils to develop their writing skills in different subjects. Phonics teaching is effective. Teachers throughout the school encourage pupils to have positive attitudes to reading. Leaders have ensured that teachers now have a much clearer overview of the attainment and progress of the individual pupils in their class. Teachers now consider this information more carefully when planning lessons.

However, leaders, have not ensured that their actions to improve the quality of teaching are consistently applied by all staff. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and how they should behave are not consistently high enough. In too many classes, teachers still do not use information about pupils' learning well enough to provide tasks and activities that are appropriate to their abilities and needs. In too many lessons, teachers do not challenge pupils of all abilities to engage with their learning and make the progress that they should. Teachers often praise pupils for their work and efforts. Too often, however, pupils lose focus or do not participate because the work is not well matched to their ability.

Leaders have been less effective in improving the effectiveness of teaching assistants in promoting pupils' progress. As identified at the previous visit, teaching assistants often provide effective support for pupils in lessons. This is not consistent, however. Some teaching assistants have received training in specific

areas, for example in relation to provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. However, leaders and the trust have not ensured that all teaching assistants have received training. Teachers have not had training to develop their expertise in deploying teaching assistants more effectively. This aspect of teaching has not been given sufficient priority in the school improvement plan.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have introduced a new school-wide system to reward pupils' good behaviour and make clear the consequences of poor behaviour. The 'planets' system is well understood by pupils and applied by all staff. Staff praise pupils who behave well. This is beginning to have an impact. Pupils respond when teachers or other staff ask for their attention. Pupils and staff say that behaviour is improving. The school's records show that the numbers of incidents of behaviour issues and concerns relating to bullying have increased. This is because leaders have ensured that staff are more rigorous in recording their concerns. There is a determination to improve behaviour.

In classrooms, behaviour has improved. Low-level disruption has reduced since the last monitoring inspection. Leaders and staff are carrying out a range of actions to improve pupils' attitudes to their learning. Changes to the curriculum mean that it is better at stimulating pupils' curiosity. The recent 'resilience day' emphasised to pupils the importance of 'try, try again'. One pupil told me how, in an art lesson, she had struggled to complete a detailed drawing but, 'I kept trying and did some really good work.' This positive outlook, however, is not shared by all pupils. In some classes, teachers do not have high enough expectations of the engagement and involvement of all pupils. Too many pupils still do not have the positive attitudes they need to be successful learners.

At playtimes, most pupils play happily together. Some pupils, however, still find it hard to maintain good behaviour. The school's records show repeated incidents of pushing and kicking on the playground. Pupils and parents still say that there is bullying in school. Pupils understand what bullying is and most are confident that staff will try to resolve any concerns they may have. Some pupils, however, still have a view that poor behaviour and bullying are an everyday part of school life. Leaders and staff have not established with sufficient rigour which behaviours are acceptable and which are not.

Leaders' work to promote pupils' social, moral and cultural development in the curriculum is still at a very early stage. Pupils I spoke with do not have a clear understanding of British values. Many displays around the school show leaders' and other staff's work to promote positive messages about behaviour and anti-bullying. Others celebrate pupils' learning. Leaders and other staff have continued work to develop the academy's values of 'creativity', 'responsibility' and 'wisdom'. Pupils are learning about the new values but they are not yet part of the school's culture.

Leaders and the governing board have not monitored this in sufficient detail. Pupils' understanding of the importance of respecting others, including those who may be from different backgrounds, families or cultures, is not sufficiently developed.

As a result of leaders' actions, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has improved slightly compared to that seen previously. Leaders take attendance seriously. Pupils' overall attendance, however, is still below the national average. Leaders are committed to emphasising the importance of attendance to parents and further developing the wide range of approaches they are using to improve attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders have introduced a new system to record their and other staff's assessments of pupils' learning. Leaders have a wealth of information about pupils' attainment and progress, including that for different groups of pupils. These groups include pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged. Assessment, however, is not yet accurate. As a result, leaders and the governing board are not as accurate or effective as they should be in analysing the progress of these groups. It is crucial that leaders take action to ensure that their and teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment and progress are accurate.

Pupils' current work shows a stronger picture of progress than that suggested by the school's information. Over time, many pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have made faster progress in their learning. Handwriting and presentation are improving. Pupils write at length in different subjects. In mathematics, pupils are developing fluency in their understanding of mathematical concepts and methods of calculation. Overall, however, teachers do not consistently match work as well as they could to pupils' abilities. The progress of pupils of average ability is faster than that of other pupils. The progress of the least able and most able pupils is often not as rapid as it should be.

External support

External support from the local authority has been effective in bringing about improvements in teaching and leadership, and to provision in the early years. A national leader for education has provided support to improve the quality of teaching in key stage 1, including the teaching of phonics.