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Mr James Hill
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hill

Short inspection of St George's Church of England Academy, Newtown

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in November 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

The school is expanding to accept two forms of entry. There are now two classes in year groups from the Reception Year to Year 3.

For a period, academic standards in the school declined. In 2017, Year 6 pupils left the school having made weak progress in reading, and with attainment that was below the national average. The school joined Birmingham Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust in September 2017, and the current headteacher started in the school in November 2017. Key stage 2 attainment rose in 2018, but attainment at the end of key stage 1 declined. The trust is ambitious for the school and has sought to accelerate the rate of improvement. Additional leaders have worked alongside the school's permanent staff to improve the quality of teaching in reading and mathematics.

Last month, the trust appointed you as executive headteacher, with a view to the school being securely good by the end of the summer term 2019. You work in the school for an average of two-and-a-half days a week. Your priority is to ensure that teachers plan sequences of lessons that progressively build up pupils' knowledge and skills. You are coaching other leaders in their roles as subject leaders.

Your self-evaluation showed that leaders have a realistic understanding of the school, its strengths as well as its weaknesses. Records show that leaders plan the expenditure of the pupil premium carefully and make detailed checks on its effectiveness. The school's improvement plans identify strategies to address the school's weaknesses, and I saw evidence during the inspection that the trust regularly evaluates the school's progress towards its stated aims. Trustees and members of the local academy board understand well how the roles of the trust and the board can complement each other effectively. Leaders showed me that they were astute observers of teaching and learning.

The school has a strong relationship with the local community. Parents I spoke with during the inspection described staff as kind and helpful. Some spoke warmly of the progress their children had made as a result of effective support to overcome additional needs. Parents said that communication was good. A recent survey suggests that almost all parents approve of how the school is managed. Leaders have taken the initiative to discover and address what matters to parents. For example, they have taken steps to ensure that school meals meet all pupils' dietary requirements.

The pupils that I met were most polite and friendly. They enjoy school, and want to succeed. Pupils' behaviour in the classroom is good. They are attentive and respectful of adults. There was no disruption, even when teachers explained ideas at length. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good, and they present the work in their books with care. At breaktimes and lunchtimes, pupils play happily. Although attendance has fallen this year, it remains close to the national average.

Pupils' good understanding of different faiths and cultures underpins their strong social and spiritual development. They have the opportunity to elect school councillors, and those pupils who spoke to me were proud that the council had raised money for charity. They believe that the competition between house teams promotes good behaviour.

Leaders have had some success in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Key stage 2 pupils' attainment in writing has been in line with the national average for the last two years. Pupils for whom English is an additional language approach their writing with confidence, although their achievement does not consistently match that of other pupils in the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The confidence that the local community places in the school underpins the strong safeguarding culture. Leaders address with pupils and their parents those issues which are particularly relevant to the local community. They are fully aware of their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty. Staff identify any problems that pupils may face and are alert to signs that they may not be safe. The school's records show that when a risk to pupils arises, leaders work effectively with parents and other agencies to protect children.

Pupils told me that bullying occurred only rarely, and they had every confidence that an adult would be able to resolve any issue promptly. They had no experience of racism or prejudice in school. Pupils were able to recall in good detail the advice that they have received on how to stay safe online. They spoke of learning about road safety, and the importance of learning to swim.

Inspection findings

- The school's records show that although the quality of teaching is improving, it is not consistently good. During the inspection, teachers sometimes did not ensure that they knew how well pupils were learning. As a result, they were unable to address misconceptions or to move on the learning of those pupils who had already grasped the new ideas or skills.
- In general, teachers provide work in English and mathematics that builds on what pupils already know and understand. However, our scrutiny of pupils' workbooks showed that sometimes the tasks set for the most able pupils did not allow them to make the progress of which they were capable. Although the academic support for these pupils was an area for improvement at the last inspection, it remains variable.
- Teachers pay due attention to handwriting and presentation in the teaching of writing. They use the correct technical terms, and encourage pupils to broaden their vocabulary. Pupils use resources, such as prompts and checklists, effectively. Teachers provide pupils with the opportunity to write in a variety of contexts and for a range of purposes. There is some work to do, however, to ensure that the style of pupils' writing is precisely matched to its purpose.
- The teaching of phonics is generally effective. Children enter the early years with language skills below those typical for their age, but many catch up quickly. In 2018, the proportion of Year 1 pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check rose to be close to the national average.
- Leaders have rightly acknowledged that teachers develop the reading of older pupils by giving them both the desire to read and the specific skills to do so. Inspection evidence showed that teachers can identify and focus on particular skills. Most, but not all, the pupils that I met enjoyed reading and said that they read at home.
- You and your colleagues are fully committed to a broad curriculum. The headteacher stated that when he was appointed there was a pressing need to increase the emphasis on subjects other than English and mathematics. Leaders have adopted a curriculum model developed by a commercial publisher to ensure broader coverage and access to essential resources. Pupils were enthusiastic about the range of subjects that they study, mentioning particularly physical education (PE), science and music.
- Work is now under way to adapt this model so that it precisely matches the needs and the ethos of the school. In some year groups, gaps in curriculum content remain. Some pupils have a restricted cultural and historical knowledge. There are currently limited opportunities for pupils to pursue their interests through after-school clubs.

- Work to develop the role of coordinators for foundation subjects is at an early stage. Staff know that they can ask coordinators for advice on how they should approach a particular topic. However, coordinators do not check on the quality of teaching in their subject. They do not ensure that the work teachers set for pupils develops their skills in that subject from their starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- weaker teaching is eliminated, through effective staff development
- teachers set work for the most able that provides a consistent and rigorous level of challenge
- work in foundation subjects builds on pupils' existing knowledge and skills, so that they make consistently strong progress in these subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Spoor
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the headteacher and other leaders. I also met members of the local academy board, and representatives of the Birmingham Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust. I observed the teaching of reading, writing and PE jointly with senior leaders. Together we looked at the work from this academic year produced by some pupils in Years 1, 3 and 6. I listened to pupils from Years 3 and 5 reading, and discussed their reading with them. I met with a group of pupils to gather their general views, and spoke informally with several more. I spoke with several parents as they dropped their children off at school. I observed pupils' behaviour at social times and as they moved around the school.

There were insufficient responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, for me to take them into account. I looked at a survey of parental opinion that you had conducted. I also considered the 16 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

I scrutinised a wide range of documents both electronically and on paper, including: the school's evaluation of its own performance and its plan for improvement; records showing how leaders monitor the quality of teaching; notes of visits to the school by representatives of the trust; records of meetings held by the local

academy board; policies; and records of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. I looked in detail at documents that show how the school keeps pupils safe.