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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Mrs Sarah Martin
Executive Headteacher
St John's Wood Academy
Longridge
Knutsford
Cheshire
WA16 8PA

Dear Mrs Martin

Special measures monitoring inspection of St John's Wood Academy

Following my visit to your school on 1 May 2019, 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
previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became
subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2018.
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 not taking effective action towards the removal of
special measures.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not
seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2018.

- Take urgent action to make sure that pupils are safe, by:
  - establishing a calm and orderly environment where all pupils and staff feel safe
  - providing further training and support for all staff to equip them with the necessary skills to deal effectively with pupils' challenging behaviour
  - ensuring the designated safeguarding leader has the skills, resources, support and authority to carry out the role effectively
  - making sure that record-keeping is meticulous
  - ensuring that pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through a carefully planned curriculum programme
  - ensuring that all risks are assessed thoroughly, actions to manage risks are suitable and checks are in place to make sure agreed plans are adhered to
  - carrying out rigorous and robust checks on all alternative providers to make sure that pupils are safe when learning off site
  - reducing persistent absence and improving attendance so that pupils are in school on time every day.
- Meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs effectively so that they are ready to learn, by:
  - making sure pupils understand how to keep themselves and others safe in school, online and in the community
  - making sure staff and pupils have an accurate understanding of what bullying is
  - following up assiduously on all instances of bullying
  - providing all staff with effective training and support so that they can meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs
  - ensuring that pupils receive the help and support they need as set out in their education, health and care plans.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment so that all groups of pupils, especially the disadvantaged, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the most able, make much better progress by ensuring that all teachers:
  - meet the requirements set out in the teachers' standards
  - have the highest expectations of what pupils can achieve

- plan work which pupils find interesting and purposeful so that they develop positive attitudes and essential behaviours for learning, including resilience, independence and perseverance

- plan learning which engages and challenges pupils, particularly the most able, and makes the best use of lesson time

- assess pupils' learning accurately and set them work which is well matched to their abilities

- make sure that pupils know how to improve their work and are given timely opportunities to respond to teachers' advice and correct mistakes

- put in place interventions to help pupils catch up so that all make better progress.

■ Improve leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:

- establishing a culture of high ambition for all pupils which is communicated to and shared by trustees, governors, leaders, staff, pupils and parents

- ensuring that leaders and governors have up-to-date, reliable information about key aspects of the school's performance, including pupils' academic achievement, behaviour and attendance

- reviewing the school's performance regularly and using the outcomes of these reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's improvement plan and hold senior leaders to account

- building the capacity of the local governing body, including through relevant training and support, so that governors have the skills, experience and expertise to expedite school improvement

- providing middle leaders with time, resources and support to ensure that they contribute to the raising of standards in their subjects across the school

- checking regularly on the progress that the different groups of pupils make and taking swift action if any group is not achieving as well as it should

- making sure that monitoring focuses on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning

- planning a cohesive curriculum, which meets the needs of pupils and enables teachers to build on pupils' prior learning across the full range of subjects

- ensuring that parents receive regular, up-to-date information about how well their children are getting on

- making sure that the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEND is well used to improve outcomes for eligible pupils.

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 pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1 May 2019

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documentation and met with senior leaders. He spoke with the chief executive officer of the Adelaide Academy Trust (AAT), the executive headteacher and the chair of the school improvement board (SIB). The inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority and a consultant who has worked with the school. The inspector met with groups of pupils and staff. He observed teaching and learning jointly with leaders and scrutinised samples of pupils' work. He observed how well pupils behaved around the school and at breaktime.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit, there have been further significant changes made to the school's staff. The headteacher, who was the designated leader of safeguarding, has now left the school and has not been replaced. The executive headteacher now spends more time at the school to oversee the school's work more closely. She is supported by another leader from the AAT, who is now the designated leader of safeguarding. A specialist leader of education (SLE) from the Cheshire Inclusive Teaching Alliance (CITA), who is also the deputy headteacher of Hebden Green School, is working closely with the school to improve teaching, learning and assessment. The special educational needs coordinator for the AAT continues to lead on improving the support that is offered to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The number of pupils on roll at the school has remained low. There are currently 18 pupils on roll, and the local authority has indicated that this is unlikely to change in the near future. This has put further strain on the school's budget. To manage this situation, leaders have further reduced the number of staff who work at the school. They have also reduced the number of leaders who are directly employed by the school.

There has been considerable turbulence in staffing since the last monitoring visit. Many staff have chosen to leave the school, due to uncertainties over its future. Most subjects are currently taught by temporary teachers.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have been hampered in their efforts to improve the school further by an increase in staffing turbulence and an over-reliance on temporary staff. Leaders have broadened the scope of their work since the last monitoring visit. In particular, they have focused on improving the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment. They have introduced clear systems to enable them to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and the extent to which pupils are learning well. Despite this, their actions have been undermined by frequent and widespread

changes to staffing. As a result, they have been unable to bring about significant improvement to teaching or pupils' learning.

Leaders have been able to sustain the improvements to safeguarding that were identified at the previous monitoring visit. The new designated leader of safeguarding is supported well by a wider safeguarding team. Her work is closely overseen by the executive headteacher, who has oversight of safeguarding across the trust. Leaders work closely with the local authority and other external agencies to minimise the risks that relate to individual pupils. Leaders' safeguarding records continue to contain an appropriate level of detail and are fit for purpose.

Leaders have ensured that there are clear induction procedures for staff who are new to the school, including those who work at the school for a short period of time. These staff have a clear understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures. Leaders have devised clear and appropriate procedures that enable short-term supply staff, who do not have access to the school's electronic systems, to communicate concerns about pupils' welfare or safety.

Pupils continue to learn about a range of relevant risks through lessons in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, and 'life skills'. Staff now receive information about pupils' SEND that is more useful. They use this information to support pupils' needs relating to their social, emotional and mental health more effectively than in the past.

Staff are now more skilled at de-escalating situations, which has contributed to the school becoming calmer. Despite this, some temporary staff are less effective at supporting pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. This has unsettled pupils. Pupils told the inspector that they have found frequent staffing changes upsetting. In some cases, pupils said that it has led to a deterioration in their emotional well-being and has caused them to lose trust in adults. This instability contributed to temporary increases in poor behaviour during the last term, which led to a slight increase in the number of fixed-term exclusions.

A small number of pupils continue to be educated away from the school site. These pupils receive tutoring and participate in work-related learning, such as work experience. Leaders are aware of the acute vulnerability of pupils who do not attend school regularly. They have developed clear systems and taken appropriate action to reduce the risks that each of these pupils faces.

Staffing volatility has also undermined the development of subject leadership, except in English. In English, staffing has been stable, and support from the trust has been consistent. As a result, leadership of this subject has been effective and has led to demonstrable improvements to the curriculum, teaching, assessment and pupils' learning. Leadership of other subjects has remained weak and this has led to stagnation in the development of these areas.

Leaders' systems for monitoring teaching and pupils' learning are much improved. Teaching is now evaluated against the teachers' standards. Despite this, these systems have not led to improved teaching and learning, due to the frequency and scale of staffing changes. Staff have not received training that has enabled them to make significant improvements to the effectiveness of teaching. Staffing instability has also hampered leaders' efforts to capture information about how well pupils are learning. Leaders have only been able to gather evidence of pupils' learning in English and mathematics, and the work scrutiny undertaken by the inspector cast doubt on the validity of the information that had been gathered by leaders. Consequently, leaders and members of the SIB continue to have little understanding of how well pupils are learning.

Leaders have narrowed the curriculum since the last visit in response to staffing reductions. For example, pupils have fewer opportunities to study design and technology. Pupils continue to have limited opportunities to gain qualifications. Some pupils told the inspector that they are worried about how the narrowness of the curriculum will impact on their options when they leave the school. They said that they feel disadvantaged compared to their peers who attend other schools. Leaders do not have a clear rationale for the development of the curriculum. The decisions that have been made relating to the curriculum have primarily been a response to staffing turbulence. Other than in English, little has been done to develop the curriculum in different subjects. The content delivered by some temporary teachers is ad hoc and does not follow the curriculum that has been devised across the trust. As a result, the curriculum has not improved and does not meet pupils' needs.

A review of the school's use of the pupil premium has now been undertaken. Leaders have used the findings of this review to amend their strategy for improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The school's actions are now more focused on alleviating identified barriers to achievement. Leaders' information indicates that disadvantaged pupils are attending school more regularly and making greater progress in English and mathematics than others at the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Other than in English, leaders have not overseen significant improvements to teaching, learning or assessment since the last monitoring visit. Staff have developed higher expectations of pupils' behaviour, but not of their learning. They are too accepting of limited engagement from pupils and work that is shoddy or half-hearted. Pupils are often given work to complete that is too easy, particularly for the most able pupils.

Leaders have monitored the effectiveness of teaching against the teachers' standards. This provided them with a clear overview of which aspects of teaching were stronger and weaker. However, this information is no longer relevant, as many staff have left, and new members have joined the school since the last round of

monitoring. As a result, leaders do not have an up-to-date understanding of the strengths and weaker aspects of teaching.

Teachers are making a greater effort to tailor the content of lessons to pupils' interests. In some cases, this is leading to pupils showing greater interest in their learning. Despite this, pupils' interest in their learning differs enormously. Pupils told the inspector that their enjoyment of learning varies greatly between different subjects and that they often lose interest in what they are studying. Most pupils indicated that they are more interested in practical subjects, such as food technology and art, and learning that takes place outdoors.

Pupils are typically behaving better in lessons than in the past. This is helped by the fact that there are often as many adults in a classroom as there are pupils. As a result, less time is wasted in lessons. Despite this, teachers are not capitalising on this improvement by providing pupils with work that is well matched to their needs. Tasks often lack purpose and challenge, and so pupils' interest often wanes.

There has been little improvement to assessment since the last visit. Leaders do have effective systems for assessing what pupils can and cannot do, but they have not been in a position to make consistent use of these systems, due to changes in staffing. The accuracy of assessment in English has improved, because arrangements for moderating assessments with other colleagues from the trust are embedded for this subject. However, assessment remains inaccurate or non-existent in other subjects. Teachers therefore do not capture information about how well pupils are learning. Teachers are unclear about what pupils need to learn to address gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Teachers sometimes identify pupils' misconceptions during lessons, but these are not routinely addressed.

Pupils do not benefit from appropriate academic interventions to help them catch up with their peers in other schools. They are not encouraged to improve their learning or work in response to feedback from staff. Teachers do not adopt consistent or effective strategies to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Teachers do not pay close attention to pupils' SEND when planning learning. They do not sequence pupils' learning well to ensure that pupils are making steady gains in their learning. As a result of the lack of progress towards the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, pupils continue to make weak progress during their time at the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour has continued to improve around the site. Pupils show respect for staff and each other at breaktimes. They enjoy playing games, such as football and cards, with members of staff. Despite feeling unsettled by staffing changes, all pupils spoken to said that there was at least one member of staff in school that they like and trust. This reflects the improving relationships between pupils and adults.

Pupils are also beginning to improve their behaviour during lessons. Fewer pupils are removed from lessons because of poor behaviour and the atmosphere is calmer than in the past. Despite this, poor behaviour, such as regular swearing, is still a feature of many lessons. Teachers do not consistently apply the school's procedures for challenging poor behaviour. As a result, the poor behaviour of a few pupils continues to have a detrimental impact on the learning of others.

Pupils and staff now have a clear understanding of what bullying is and the different forms it can take. All pupils spoken to indicated that bullying is very rare and that they would trust staff to resolve such issues should they occur.

Pupils' improved attendance has broadly been maintained since the last visit. Attendance is over 15% higher than it was during the previous academic year. This is the result of the sustained improvements that leaders have made to reward regular attendance and challenge unnecessary absence. Despite this, improvements to attendance plateaued during the last term. Rates of absence and persistent absence remain too high. Pupils are rarely late to the school and typically arrive to lessons on time.

Pupils are not being supported effectively to develop the attitudes and behaviours that are essential for learning. Pupils continue to lose interest in their work and lack the resilience, perseverance and stamina to complete extended pieces of work to the best of their ability.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders do not have a clear overview of how well pupils are learning across the curriculum. They only have information for English and mathematics. Their information indicates that pupils are making similar progress in English and mathematics, and that pupils are making better progress in key stage 3. However, the work scrutiny created a different picture and showed that pupils' learning is more effective in English, particularly in key stage 4, where pupils produce extended writing which is of high quality.

Pupils in key stage 4 have limited opportunities to gain qualifications. All pupils are entered for several GCSEs in English and a GCSE in mathematics. A small number of pupils are entered for a GCSE in science. All pupils are studying towards entry-level qualifications in PSHE and public services. They are also working towards the completion of vocational qualifications at Reaseheath College.

Due to improved careers education, information, advice and guidance, all pupils currently in key stage 4 have a target destination for when they leave at the end of Year 11. Leaders are hopeful that there will be a significant reduction in the proportion of pupils who are not in education, employment or training once they leave the school.

Leaders have introduced systems to evaluate pupils' social and emotional development. This information gives them a clearer understanding of where pupils' personal development is more and less strong. Their information confirms that many pupils are still struggling to regulate their own emotions and behaviour.

External support

Leaders have continued to commission an external consultant to quality-assure the school's work. This work has provided an impartial evaluation of the school's progress.

The SLE from CITA has helped to develop many of the school's systems for improving teaching, learning and assessment. For example, the SLE has supported leaders to improve their monitoring and evaluation of teaching. Despite this, these efforts have been undermined by an increase in staffing turbulence and an over-reliance on temporary staff.