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Miss Louise Bonter and Mr Chris Gibson
Acting headteachers
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Dear Miss Bonter and Mr Gibson

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St John's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 May 2018, 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 March 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteachers, six governors, a representative from the local authority and a representative from the diocese. Her Majesty's Inspector also spoke with representatives of the Sole Fide Trust, the proposed sponsor that is currently providing support for the school. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. Her Majesty's Inspector met with staff from across the school in a range of roles to discuss safeguarding. A discussion was also held with eight pupils from Year 4 and Year 5. Her Majesty's Inspector also talked with five parents at the start of the school day and visited lessons to check pupils' behaviour and to look at their work. The classroom observations were carried out jointly with the infant and junior acting headteachers. Her Majesty's Inspector also reviewed pupils' work in writing, and mathematics in Year 2, Year 4 and Year 6.

Context

Since the last inspection, the headteacher has retired and the deputy headteachers of the infant and junior sites are now the acting headteachers of the school. They are supported by an experienced local headteacher two days a week. This leadership support is being provided by the Sole Fide Trust. Both acting headteachers continue to have a two-day teaching commitment each week. Since the previous inspection, the Sole Fide Trust has been named as the academy sponsor for the school. The governing body has been supported by a national leader of governance. This support has been brokered by Oldham local authority and has been in place since March 2018.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders and governors have taken swift action to remedy the serious failings in safeguarding at the school. With the support of the local authority and the Sole Fide Trust, leaders have introduced a comprehensive training package for staff and governors. The nominated governors for safeguarding conduct frequent and appropriate checks and audits of the school's safeguarding to challenge and support leaders. The four designated leaders of safeguarding have received updated training on their roles and responsibilities. This has been effective in ensuring that they are knowledgeable about how to keep pupils safe. Leaders have established a clear system for recording concerns about any pupil. This system is known and understood by all staff. Consequently, staff are alert to any signs that pupils may be at risk of harm and leaders are swift and decisive in the action that they take to support pupils and their families.

Leaders have ensured that all instances of poor behaviour are logged by class teachers, and that this is monitored and analysed regularly. This also includes the recording of instances of bullying, which pupils say are rare. Leaders log alleged bullying incidents and investigate them thoroughly.

Staff are aware of their duty to protect pupils from harm. They are vigilant. Leaders present regular case studies for staff to discuss. These have been pivotal in changing the attitudes of staff so that they are aware that 'it could happen here'. All of the staff that the inspector spoke to are knowledgeable and have a sharp awareness of the current statutory guidance for safeguarding. Pupils say that they feel safe. They say that this is due to the better security measures for entry to the school, as well as the care and supervision of staff.

Despite leaders' success in tackling the serious shortcomings in safeguarding, the impact of their work elsewhere is more limited. The school continues to be affected by a legacy of weak leadership that has left new leaders and staff deskilled. The drive for improvement relies too heavily upon the external support provided by the Sole Fide Trust. The acting headteachers are keen to turn the school around and to

build up their own leadership skills. As a result, they are working positively with representatives from the trust and they are responding appropriately to all of the support that is being offered.

Delays in the reconstitution of the governing body have led to confusion around governors' roles and responsibilities. Although a review of their effectiveness has taken place, this was ineffective and did not provide a clear direction for the governors. The local authority has brokered the support of a national leader of governance at the request of the chair of the governing body. While there are signs that governors are better equipped to tackle weaknesses in the school, progress has been slow. Consequently, governors have not taken effective action to address the areas for improvement detailed in the previous inspection report. Although improved, the website is still not fully compliant with statutory requirements. Furthermore, a review of the pupil premium funding, a recommendation from the previous inspection, has not taken place. As a result, governors' awareness of the impact of the pupil premium on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is weak.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose. The targets in the plan do not go far enough in identifying the anticipated impact of leaders' actions. This means that leaders, including governors, are unable to evaluate the difference that their work is making in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Governors have too little oversight of school improvement because they rely too heavily on senior leaders to provide information about the impact of the strategies to improve the school. The minutes of the governing body meetings show that governors do not question leaders about pupils' outcomes in enough depth.

Leaders have updated their equality policy and pupils show a good awareness of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act. These first steps have enhanced the school's provision to equip pupils for life in modern Britain. Displays show the work that pupils have covered on British values. However, this is not fully embedded and leaders understand the need to build on this positive start and promote this aspect of school life further. Pupils have a good understanding of other faiths and they are respectful and polite. They reflect well on different aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are inquisitive, confident and humble. It is a credit to leaders and staff that, despite the turmoil within governance, pupils' outcomes and perceptions of the school have not been affected.

The acting headteachers have been proactive in tackling pupils' absence with support from the local authority. Their thorough analysis of the attendance of individual pupils has identified where support for pupils and their families is needed most to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. The tenacious actions of the acting headteachers have resulted in improved attendance for all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There has been a marked reduction in persistent absence.

Pupils' attainment by the end of key stage 2 in 2017 was broadly average overall in

reading, writing and mathematics. This represents an improvement in writing from the low attainment experienced in 2016, but attainment in reading and mathematics is similar. Nonetheless, there has not been enough action taken to challenge the most able pupils to achieve the highest standards in writing and in mathematics since the previous inspection. The progress of these pupils remains below that seen of other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics, although this is slowly improving. The work in pupils' books shows that the most able pupils are starting to be challenged further in their mathematics and writing work. This is filtering through into the work of Year 6 pupils, but it is not consistent across all year groups. This is also reflected in the school's own assessment information. For example, lower down the school, pupils' work shows that the most able pupils do different calculations from other groups of pupils. However, the calculations are of the same level of difficulty as the work provided for other pupils, and therefore do not provide challenge.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body the director of education for the Diocese of Manchester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oldham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Bentham

Her Majesty's Inspector