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Miss Emma Murtagh
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Dear Emma Murtagh

Short inspection of St Oswald's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 2017, 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You provide highly effective leadership and you have set a clear vision that has contributed to improving the school since the last inspection. I was struck by the welcoming atmosphere of the school and the strong sense of care and nurture for the whole school community. Staff who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire are very proud to be part of St Oswald's School. Crucially, you have built a strong leadership and staff team who share your commitment and drive to provide the very best education, care and support for each pupil. Governors, staff, parents and pupils have confidence and trust in your leadership.

The overwhelming majority of parents who spoke to me or responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, are very positive about the school and would recommend it to others. A number of parents particularly appreciate that the school is supportive and that you and your staff are welcoming and approachable. Comments such as 'Miss Murtagh and her team look after the children and are never too busy to help', 'The teachers are an asset to the school', 'This is a fantastic school' and 'The pupils always come first' are typical.

You have maintained the significant strengths noted at the previous inspection, notably in pupils' behaviour. Pupils are friendly, they behave well and they look after each other. Pupils say: 'Our school is a big family, what matters is that we are kind

to one another.' Relationships between pupils and teachers are strong. Pupils listen attentively to their teachers and work with maturity. They are polite, respectful and enjoy coming to school. Pupils say that they value their learning because it helps to prepare them for getting a good job when they leave school.

You and your leadership team have focused relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching and learning. At the previous inspection, you were asked to make sure that all the learning activities matched the needs of the pupils and, in particular, that the most able pupils were challenged by the work set for them. As I visited classrooms and looked at pupils' work, I noted that the pitch of work is appropriately challenging for all abilities, including the most able, and that pupils work with confidence and enthusiasm. You and your staff have worked well to make sure that pupils have good attitudes to learning. Lessons are purposeful and time is used well. Consequently, pupils are making good progress in their learning across a range of subjects.

Since the previous inspection a number of new governors have been appointed. Governors demonstrate a strong commitment to the pupils' learning and to supporting the work of staff and leaders. They are aware of what the school does well and what improvements are needed. They have attended a range of appropriate training and as a result are knowledgeable and well equipped to support and challenge the school's work. However, they are not always clear on progress and outcomes for specific groups of pupils, as the school improvement plan does not focus tightly enough on key priorities and lacks clear, measurable targets against which the governors can assess progress.

Children enter the early years with abilities below those typical for their age. The strong focus on speech and language development, together with new leadership, have invigorated the early years and led to significant improvements in outcomes. The proportion of pupils attaining a good level of development has risen markedly and was just below the national average in 2016. This means that a greater number of pupils are ready for their next stage of learning in Year 1. Leaders have successfully implemented a new phonics programme. As a result of high-quality professional development, strong leadership and the dedication of the staff, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 has risen to above national averages. Consequently, pupils are well prepared to make good progress in reading and writing as they move through school.

You rightly acknowledge that previously, across the school, pupils have not made enough progress in writing, particularly the most able pupils. As a result, you and the English leader have put in place strategies and support to ensure that all pupils make maximum progress in writing. Pupils' books, including those of the most able pupils, are showing accelerated progress in writing across a range of subjects.

The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is higher than the national average. In 2016, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils was below the national average for this group in reading and maths, and no disadvantaged pupil attained the high standard in any subject. The school has recognised this as an area for

improvement and has put in place appropriate actions to ensure that this group of pupils is sufficiently challenged in all year groups. Pupil premium funding is used effectively to provide a range of appropriate programmes and additional teaching support and, as a result, an increasing number of pupils in each year group are making good progress towards attaining the high standard. However, as this strategy is relatively new, it is too early to gauge the impact on diminishing the difference between outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Keeping children safe is a priority at this school. You, senior leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements, including policies and procedures, are fit for purpose. The strong culture of safeguarding is evident in all aspects of school life. The school site is well maintained and secure. The checks made on staff who work at the school meet requirements. All relevant documentation is in place. All staff receive regular training in aspects of safeguarding – they are clear on what to do if they have a concern about a pupil.

The pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They talked about safety online and not giving out personal details to anyone they did not know. The pupils know about different types of bullying. They said that bullying rarely happens and if it does then adults deal with it quickly and it stops. Parents' views clearly indicate that the school looks after the safety of their children very well.

Inspection findings

- The school has a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities compared with the national average. The leader of provision for pupils who have special needs and/or disabilities is passionate and knowledgeable about her pupils. She has a good understanding of the needs of the pupils across the school and ensures that funding for these pupils is spent wisely. She liaises effectively with parents, pupils, teachers and external agencies to ensure that support programmes meet the needs of all pupils. As a result of the high-quality provision they receive, they make good progress in line with their national peers.
- Mathematics is a strength of the school. Pupils make strong progress as a result of high-quality teaching. The proportions of pupils attaining the expected and higher standards are above the national average by the end of Year 6. Pupils are clearly motivated to achieve through the mathematical challenges and competitions they take part in. As one pupil told me, 'It's great to be top of the leaderboard.'
- The school development plan outlines what the school needs to do to improve outcomes for pupils and is well understood by staff. However, targets are not always sharply focused on specific priorities and some are not measurable. This makes it difficult for governors and senior leaders to monitor with rigour the progress that the school is making towards achieving its goals.
- Leaders spend funding for disadvantaged pupils wisely and appropriately. The website information is compliant in respect of pupil premium spending, but does

not identify the success or otherwise of individual strategies. The school recognises how to strengthen this and has the information to give more detail to the report.

- Attendance is closely monitored by the school. 2016 data showed that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils was below the national average and that persistent absence was high. Current school data shows an improvement in the attendance of this group of pupils and that, as a result of the school's work with individual pupils and families, persistent absence has reduced and is now broadly in line with the national average. The school supports pupils in understanding the importance of regular attendance and uses a range of rewards and incentives to recognise their efforts.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- The most able disadvantaged pupils are challenged and supported to enable them to reach the high standard.
- Leadership and management are strengthened further by ensuring that all targets in the school development plan are clear, measurable and securely linked to school priorities.

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

Yours sincerely

Aleksandra Hartshorne
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your two assistant headteachers and the leader for English to discuss the impact of actions you are taking to raise standards across the school. You accompanied me on a visit to each class, where we observed the teaching of phonics and writing, and looked at some work in pupils' books. I met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body, and with a representative of the local authority. I spoke with a group of pupils from Year 2 to Year 6 and took account of 28 responses to the pupil online survey. I spoke with several parents at the start of the day and took account of 41 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I reviewed 20 responses made by staff to the online survey. I considered your school website, your self-evaluation report, your school improvement plan and information about the achievement of current pupils. I also reviewed some pupils' workbooks from different year groups. I considered the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the checks made on adults who work at the school.