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Dear Miss Gallaher

Short inspection of Milton St John's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since the previous inspection, a new deputy headteacher has been appointed. There has been some turbulence in staffing due to a number of staff taking maternity leave. Moreover, due to high demand in the local area for school places last year, you have an additional class in Year 1. You have minimised the impact of these changes on the pupils.

You have taken the school from strength to strength. You and your deputy headteacher have the unequivocal support of parents, governors, staff and pupils. You have an ambitious vision for the school, which is shared by governors and staff. You work tirelessly to make sure that your pupils have the best possible start in life. Your successful school is held in high regard by the local authority, parents and the local community. As one parent told the inspector, 'Milton is a fantastic school with caring and committed staff.'

As a faith school, the Christian ethos and values are a golden thread which runs through all your work. The school's mission is for every pupil to 'SHINE in the love of God'. Pupils are proud to earn recognition for being honest or persevering with tricky work. You make sure that your school is at the heart of the local community. Your pupils take an active role in Mossley life, competing in the Mossley 'Mammoth Hunt', Olympics and talent competition as well as petitioning the council to save land from development.

Your pupils enjoy coming to school. They wear their uniforms with pride, take care with their work, listen attentively to their teachers and look after each other. Pupils develop respect for people who are different to themselves. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain. The school has earned the 'Investors in Pupils' award. As part of the award, pupils have discovered how their school is run, their role in it and how they can make a difference. A wide range of trips, clubs and activities helps your pupils to develop broader skills and extends their learning. Lunchtime and after-school clubs are immensely popular.

You place great importance on empowering parents and carers to be key partners in their children's education. You offer regular workshops to help them to support their children's learning better. You make sure that parents have plenty of opportunities to talk to class teachers and look at their children's work. The school has a thriving parent teacher association, which hosts a wealth of events to raise funds for school. Parents feel well informed about how their children are getting on in school and are confident that any rare concerns will be dealt with well by staff.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked the school to improve the quality of leadership at all levels. In particular, your middle leaders have stepped up to the mark. They now have a deep understanding of the progress that pupils are making in their subjects. Leaders at all levels keep a closer eye on assessment and tracking information, make more frequent visits to classes, check on work in pupils' books and talk to pupils about their learning. This wealth of information helps all leaders to write well-considered action plans which have a sharp focus on raising standards across the school.

Inspectors had also raised concerns about limited resources in the outdoor area for children in the early years. Your early years leader and her colleagues have transformed the outdoor space into a stimulating learning environment. You have made sure that your early years staff have accessed a wealth of training so that they make good use of the new resources. When we visited the classes, the mud kitchen, construction and creative areas were a hive of activity.

At the previous inspection, you were also asked to improve the quality of teaching. You and your teachers make good use of the information you collect about pupils' attainment and progress. Teachers make sure that they keep a close eye on pupils' learning during lessons. They use this information effectively to plan work which matches pupils' ability better. Teachers move the most able pupils on swiftly, in reading and mathematics, and consolidate the learning of those who need more support to be proficient. Your subject leaders have made sure that curriculum plans include plenty of opportunities for pupils to practise reading, writing and mathematics in the different subjects. Themed days and weeks, such as 'the alien landing' and 'crime scene', provide further opportunities for pupils to develop their basic skills. During my visit, I observed Year 5 pupils using their skills in mathematics to help them work out local time zones around the world as part of their geography lesson.

When we visited classes, we spent time looking at work in pupils' books. We saw at

first hand the impact of the work your team have done to improve writing across the school. These improvements have started to pay dividends. Last year, more pupils reached the expected standards in writing at the end of key stages 1 and 2. However, we agree that there is still more work to do. We identified that pupils in key stages 1 and 2 could further hone their skills in extended writing. Moreover, it is important to focus on challenging your most able pupils so that more of them achieve the higher standards of which they are capable.

The overwhelming majority of your pupils rarely miss a day of school. However, despite the small numbers of disadvantaged pupils, too many of them are missing out on learning due to poorer punctuality and higher rates of absence. You work closely with families who are struggling to get their children to school, making sure that they get the help they need. This approach is making a positive difference. However, we discussed the importance of stepping in at the earliest opportunity, before any attendance and punctuality issues become entrenched. You agree that this needs to be highlighted as a key priority in your pupil premium strategy.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Leaders carry out comprehensive checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. Staff undertake frequent training so they understand their roles and responsibilities. Record-keeping is meticulous. The school has forged good relationships with external agencies to help children and their families access the help they need. Pupils are adamant that the very rare incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively by staff. Pupils are confident that they have a trusted adult with whom they can share any worries. Parents, pupils and staff agree that pupils are well cared for and safe.

Inspection findings

- Over the past few years, you have worked closely with a local high school and a number of primary schools. This partnership is one of the keys to your success. Together, these schools provide challenge and support to each other, working together to improve the life chances for all pupils in Mossley and Carrbrook. Governors and staff speak highly of the benefits that this partnership have brought to the school through training, collaboration and support. It is not just the adults who have reaped the rewards. You work closely with your high school colleagues to provide a first-rate experience for your pupils as they move on from Milton St John's.
- Staff morale is high. Staff are proud to work at this happy and successful school. They appreciate senior leaders' consideration for their well-being, willingness to let them try out new ideas and support for their professional development. However, staff respect the high standards that you and your deputy headteacher expect. They are clear about their roles and responsibilities in making sure that the school continues to improve. Staff know that you will not shy away from the difficult conversations needed when performance is not up to scratch.
- You have an accurate view of the school's performance. You and your governors

are clear what you need to do next. By their own admission, governors make much better use of time during meetings and visits to school than previously. Governors ask more challenging questions and hold middle and senior leaders to account. Governors attend training regularly and keep up to date with changes in school. The school makes good use of additional funding. However, some of the school's plans for the allocation of additional funding, for example the physical education and sports and pupil premium, make it tricky for governors to monitor the impact of spending easily.

- Pupils at Milton St John's achieve high standards in reading and mathematics. You and your colleagues are determined to eliminate the historical weaker performance in writing across the school. The improvements you have put in place are starting to make a positive difference. More pupils across the school are making at least good rates of progress. Outcomes for boys in key stage 1 match the outcomes of the girls now. Pupils' performance in writing at key stage 2 is catching up with that in reading and mathematics. However, you know that not enough of your most able pupils are reaching the high standards of which they are capable.
- Your youngest children continue to make good progress from their starting points. However, you are concerned that when they start in early years, children's reading, writing and mathematics lag behind other areas now. You have plans in place to increase the opportunities for your youngest children in the early years to develop these key skills so that they catch up quickly with the other areas. Moreover, your early years lead is starting to make links with the settings which children come from to help them get children better prepared for their move to Milton St John's. This approach should help these young children to be even better equipped when they start in Year 1.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further improve standards in writing across the school so that pupils' performance, particularly that of the most able, matches that in reading and mathematics
- continue to take action to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

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 Tameside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- The inspector met with senior leaders, teaching and support staff. The inspector met with the chair, vice-chair and a member of the governing body.
- The inspector also spoke to a representative of the local authority as well as an independent consultant who works with the school.
- The inspector considered the 26 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. The inspector talked to parents at the start of the school day.
- The inspector met formally with a group of staff and considered the 11 responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff.
- The inspector talked informally to pupils throughout the school day, considered the 84 responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils as well as results of the school's own survey.
- The inspector visited classrooms and checked on pupils' work, both in books and on wall displays.
- The inspector looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment, the school's self-evaluation and action plan as well as a range of other documentation.
- The inspector conducted a review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's policies and procedures to keep pupils safe, training records, recruitment checks and record-keeping.