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Mrs Sue Clare
Headteacher
Merefield School
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Dear Mrs Clare

Short inspection of Merefield School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with Linda Jones, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2012.

The school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since the previous inspection, you have managed a number of challenges with great success, with the support of your governing body. These include a sharp increase in pupil numbers, recruitment of new staff and leadership changes as well as additional building work.

The areas for improvement from the last inspection have also been tackled extremely well, so that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently good or better. Your motto, 'And the main thing is learning...' is in great evidence in all classrooms throughout the school. Staff teams are passionate about their work. They collaborate with great effect to ensure that every pupil engages actively in all lessons, regardless of their needs. Staff and parents spoken to, or who completed questionnaire surveys, are overwhelmingly positive about the work of the school. Parents said such things as: 'I cannot praise Merefield School highly enough' and 'They meet the children's needs by individually addressing them.' Parents confirm that they receive valuable information about their children's progress.

You have overseen a successful building programme that has enhanced your 16 to 19 provision. Staff and learners make the best possible use of this wonderful facility, so that learners progress successfully towards independence and adulthood.

Since the last inspection, you have developed the leadership and management skills of middle leaders so that they contribute extremely well towards the implementation of agreed school improvement actions. Staff teams have been successful in ensuring that pupils have precise learning and other developmental targets that are closely matched to their individual needs. Teachers make full reference to these targets when planning their lessons.

Teachers and teaching assistants work sensitively to encourage pupils' social and communication interaction skills and independence. Pupils have consistently strong attitudes to learning. As a result, the great majority of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good or better progress from their starting points when arriving at the school in English and mathematics. Pupils also make good or better progress towards achieving their individual behavioural, social, personal, physical and sensory goals.

Your school has recently received a national award for rights and responsibilities which recognises how successful staff are in ensuring that your pupils are nurtured in a safe learning environment. Pupils' behaviour in and around school is excellent. Pupils take responsibility for their actions and show care for each other and their surroundings.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding continues to be a strength of the school's work. The procedures for the recruitment of staff are robust. Detailed checks of their suitability to work are made. There is a safeguarding culture within the school because safeguarding is everybody's responsibility. Staff spoken to were able to explain the procedures that they follow if they have a safeguarding concern. Staff and governors receive updated training, for example in ensuring how to keep pupils keep safe on the internet. The school's records are well maintained. Pupils' files are securely held and in chronological order. Interventions for children looked after ensure that they are kept safe, attend well and make good progress. Pupils spoken to say that they feel safe in school and that they know how to keep safe when using a personal computer. Risk assessments for visits, behaviour and medical needs are in place and cover possible or likely eventualities.

Inspection findings

- Teachers and teaching assistants use signing and other selected resources well to increase pupils' access to and engagement in lessons. For example, technology aids are provided for pupils to indicate their likes and dislikes in food technology lessons. Pupils interact extremely well with each other during lessons, for example when working out the day of the week and the date and

then selecting numbers from a range of alternatives together. Younger children demonstrate independence in the early years department when they persevere in completing a piece of art work.

- Pupils further up the school select and engage in leisure activities from a range of options at lunchtimes. As a result, they develop their social and communication skills outside the classroom. They develop their independence and self-confidence further when attending off-site work experience placements or when engaging in residential trips or the Duke of Edinburgh's Award activities.
- The leadership of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has continued to improve at a rapid rate. Staff are keen to reflect in depth about their teaching and support for pupils and how they can improve even further. You and your governors have successfully developed your middle leadership team to increase leadership capacity even further.
- All learners, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve a mathematics and English qualification when they leave the school. They also receive a comprehensive 'record of achievement' folder that reflects the wide range of educational experiences that they have had during their time in school. You are proud that all leavers go on to further education, work based learning or social enterprise placements.
- You make effective use of a Merseyside special schools partnership to help monitor your pupils' progress and achievements and to share best practice. You are now in the process of developing a means by which you can extend this work to benchmark your pupils' outcomes against other similar schools nationally.
- Since the last inspection, you have overseen a comprehensive review of the school's curriculum. This has resulted in pupils accessing a wide range of enriching and exciting learning, including forest school activities, residential experiences, community visits, college and work placements. Evidence of these activities is kept in individual pupils' curriculum folders, which are shared with parents. Pupils' personal targets are promoted well through other subjects. A number of pupils also have access to rebound therapy (improving physical mobility through trampoline sessions) and hydrotherapy (water-based activities). Music, physical education and off-site sports activities are very well promoted. The school recently received the Sefton Schools Sports Team of the Year Award. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is a significant strength of the school's work. For example, pupils have been involved in raising funds for local charities and towards the creation of an extensive outdoor play area.
- Your staff have recently completed a further review of the curriculum to agree future action points to include further subjects.
- Your systems for monitoring the attendance of pupils are strong and systematic. You identify and target pupils who are persistently absent. You follow these concerns up with families and other agencies. Despite some successes, there is still work to be done to ensure that all groups of pupils

improve their attendance in line with the highest levels in the school.

- Governors receive clear information about different pupil groups, including those who are disadvantaged. They know that the majority of pupils make good or better progress from their starting points in mathematics and English.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all groups of pupils have high attendance and/or low persistent absence rates.

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

Yours sincerely

Jon Ashley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the team met with you, your deputy headteacher and two other senior teachers. A meeting was held with the chair of the governing body and five other governors (including one parent governor). A telephone conversation was held with the school's external consultant. Inspectors conducted joint observations with the heads of the lower and upper schools. They looked at pupils' learning journals, work books, folders, individual education plans and classroom displays. Inspectors observed pupils on arrival from school transport, on the school corridors, in the dining area and on the playground. Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including the school's review of its strengths and areas to develop, the school development plan and information about pupils' ability levels and progress. Inspectors looked at documentation relating to safeguarding, including safe recruitment of staff and risk assessments. They considered staff and parent questionnaire survey information, including that from the online questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.