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Mrs B Wood
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Dear Mrs Wood

Short inspection of St Oswald's Catholic Primary School, Longton

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 2018, 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your highly effective leadership has ensured that the school has sustained its high standards by responding quickly to any changes in pupils' outcomes. You have created an aspirational environment that has the well-being of pupils at its core. Consequently, pupils gain confidence and flourish in a range of subjects. Governors have a range of appropriate skills and experience and take their responsibilities seriously. They are well organised and adept at analysing the information about pupils' achievement. They know the school well and challenge you and other leaders considerably.

The vast majority of parents and carers are positive about the school. One comment summed up the sentiments expressed by many parents responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey: 'We feel that it is a very caring school, with a strong sense of community that filters down through all of the pupils. We believe this is due to the leadership of the head and her ability to build such a close-knit team within the school. As parents, this gives us the confidence that our child is in a safe and caring learning environment.' Pupils enjoy learning. They enjoy the engaging curriculum, the results of which are celebrated in displays around the school.

At your last inspection, you were asked to ensure that staff challenge pupils sufficiently in their learning. Teachers use assessment accurately to ensure that work is well matched to pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils' progress and their attainment across subjects are good. Another area for improvement was to develop middle leadership. You

have worked with these teachers to develop their effectiveness in leading improvements in their subject areas. Middle leaders now play a much more important and successful part in the work of the school. They share their evaluations of the impact of their work with staff, senior leaders and governors and plan the next steps for improvement. Teachers who started at the school in the early stages of their careers are enthusiastic because of the opportunities that have been made available to them. This has resulted in highly motivated staff who are keen about their areas of responsibility. They appreciate the opportunity to share ideas and expertise with other colleagues. This is adding greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Teachers' improving subject knowledge has had a positive impact on the progress of pupils in mathematics, which is above average by the end of key stage 2.

During the inspection, we discussed the next steps required to enable the school to improve further. You have developed a very effective curriculum across English and mathematics. However, although your assessment system allows you to track attainment and progress across other subjects, you should ensure that teachers identify the precise next steps in pupils' learning. This will allow them to excel and show their depth of understanding across these subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children, and the governing body is rigorous in its duty to ensure that adults safeguard pupils. Knowledgeable staff meticulously implement the school's policies relating to safeguarding. As the designated safeguarding lead, you champion the needs of pupils above all else. You and your staff care deeply for your pupils, and they and their parents know that they can rely on you and your staff if they have any concerns.

Pupils spoken to during the inspection said that they know how to keep themselves safe, especially when using the internet. They enjoy coming to school and feel safe and secure. The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View believe that their children are safe in the school. There is a wonderful, calm atmosphere and the excellent behaviour of the children is impressive. Governors and the representative of the local authority were unanimous in their praise for you and your staff for your unwavering commitment to children's mental health and to developing resilient, healthy and confident individuals in your school.

Inspection findings

- We agreed several areas of enquiry for this inspection. The first of these was about the actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes in phonics, especially for boys. In 2017, there was a slight dip in phonics outcomes after they had been above national averages for three years. There is a consistent and structured phonics programme in place that is ensuring that all pupils engage in their learning. Adults across the early years and key stage 1 make sure that learners have many opportunities to develop their early English skills. Teachers provide frequent practice of reading suitable words throughout the day. In Reception, for example, one child was able to read a book to

me using phonics skills to read most new words accurately. The sample of writing seen from early years and Year 1 pupils demonstrates that they progress from writing single phonetically plausible words to writing accurately in sentences. Staff assess the progress that pupils make effectively. If pupils do start to fall behind, help is provided in small groups or individually so that they can catch up quickly. Work in pupils' books shows that they are challenged and writing is of a high quality, as they use their knowledge of phonics to spell words accurately.

- The next area we looked at was how well you are improving outcomes in writing. There is clear evidence from this inspection that your focus on improving the quality of writing is having a positive impact on pupils' writing skills and confidence. A scrutiny of work in pupils' books showed that they regularly write at greater length in a range of subjects. Using assessments well, you ensure that teaching is very closely matched to the abilities of pupils. In addition, information in the school improvement plan is precise, ensuring that everyone knows what they need to do to help pupils make stronger progress in writing. The new curriculum engages all groups of pupils, giving them a range of opportunities to develop their writing. As a result of opportunities to write at length across the curriculum, the proportion of pupils who achieve the standards expected for their age in writing has increased across the school. Consequently, there is good progress across most year groups, with some rapid progress and high-quality writing in Years 5 and 6.
- Teachers make specific aspects of spelling, grammar and punctuation a focus in each year group. They have consistently high expectations of the quality of work that pupils produce. Outcomes in grammar, punctuation and spelling at the end of Year 6 compare very favourably to the national average, and the work of current pupils shows similar attention to these skills. As a result, pupils take care in producing work to be proud of. For example, work in geography on the topic of global warming shows how geographical skills are developed alongside grammar and sentence structure in extended pieces of writing.
- The final area we agreed to look at was how well the curriculum contributes to improved outcomes for all groups of pupils. Pupils are engaged by the curriculum because of motivating themes based around learning. Staff relate work to pupils' interests and base curricular topics around them. Connecting effective literacy development with interesting and imaginative contexts also helps pupils make progress. For example, writing in science on the dangers of the environment for living things produced good-quality writing while developing subject-specific skills and knowledge. Pupils develop their artistic abilities across the many creative opportunities planned within the curriculum. Throughout the school, pupils' thriving creative abilities demonstrate that their artistic skills develop well over time. Pupils make good progress in a wide range of subjects because they are enthusiastic about their learning. Assessment systems are in place for subjects other than English and mathematics but are at an early stage for measuring progress across key stages in some subjects. We agreed that you should use the recent enhancements to the current assessment system to inform pupils' next steps so that they develop depth and mastery across all subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they use the recent refinements to the assessment system to identify the precise next steps in pupils' learning that will allow them to excel and show their depth of understanding in a wide range of subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hunter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, about their work and school life. I held meetings with you, senior staff and middle leaders to discuss improvements in their areas of responsibility. I looked at learning in pupils' books. I also spoke to the local authority improvement partner.

I reviewed documentation, which included your evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the school development plan. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered 113 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I also considered responses to the online staff questionnaire.

I visited classes, together with you, to observe pupils' learning. I met with governors to discuss aspects of school leadership and management. I reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.