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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 October 2018

Mr Stephen Brierley
Principal
St Margaret's Church of England Academy
Aigburth Road
Liverpool
Merseyside
L17 6AB

Dear Mr Brierley,

Short inspection of St Margaret's Church of England Academy

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 2018 with Dympna Woods, 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 May 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Together with your staff, you have created a warm and welcoming learning environment. Teachers, including in the sixth form, develop caring and supportive relationships with pupils and students. Pupils value the help that their teachers provide. Pupils typically demonstrate positive attitudes to learning; they are attentive and try hard to complete their work. Around school pupils are polite and courteous. They show respect for each other and for adults in the school. Pupils report that any boisterous behaviour on the yard is quickly dealt with by staff. Staff are proud to work in the school. You take teachers' workload into consideration and show concern for their welfare. Parents and carers would recommend the school to other parents. They are confident that their children are happy and safe.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to raise standards by ensuring that teachers challenge pupils to think deeper about their work. You have responded to this with varying levels of success. Some teachers have high expectations of pupils' achievement. Where this is the case, teachers' strong subject knowledge, together with skilful questioning, allows pupils to develop their understanding. However, other teachers do not have the same high expectations. In these instances, pupils' learning can lack challenge and sometimes teaching activities focus on things that pupils already know. Consequently, the quality of teaching is inconsistent across

subjects and year groups. This results in pupils making variable rates of progress over time.

Some pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable considering their starting points when they join the school in Year 7. You are now using detailed individual action plans to target appropriate interventions to improve the progress of pupils who have fallen behind. These have previously been successful in improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils. I know that you are hopeful that this will result in reducing the year-on-year fluctuations in pupils' progress and attainment. However, it is currently too early in the year to determine if this will bring about sustained success.

You and your leadership team are aware that there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. You have acted to address some of these weaknesses and there are plans in place to improve teachers' questioning skills. However, your actions to date have not been wholly successful, which means the wide variation in the quality of teaching continues across year groups and subjects. This is partly because the methods you employ to evaluate the quality of teaching are not fully effective. Consequently, priorities for improvement lack precision and the strategies that are put in place to improve teaching are not predicated upon a clear understanding of the root causes of pupils' weaker progress in some areas.

Governors are dedicated to securing the best outcomes for pupils. They bring a wide range of skills to their roles. They are clear about which aspects of the school require further development. For example, they were aware of which subjects have outcomes that are not good enough, such as business studies and geography.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have created a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Together with your team, you have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You provide regular safeguarding training and all staff know how to identify pupils that need help. Staff understand the school's safeguarding policies and follow the appropriate steps to ensure pupils' safety.

You have ensured that pupils know how to keep themselves safe through the 'learning for life' sessions that are regularly taught in school. Pupils told inspectors that incidents of bullying were rare and quickly dealt with when they occurred. Pupils also said that there was always an adult in school that they could talk to if they had any concerns.

Pupils could talk about prejudice and clearly understood the importance of tolerance for those with other beliefs. They explained that at St Margaret's Academy they did not just tolerate people that were different from themselves, they accepted and welcomed them into the community.

Inspection findings

- I explored how well leaders are securing sustained progress for pupils. I know that you have previously taken action to improve pupils' progress. Together with your leadership team, you have attempted to evaluate the reasons for the fluctuating results year on year. In some years, the actions that you have undertaken as a result of these evaluations have led to considerable gains, only to drop again the following year. It is therefore clear that your evaluations do not give a full enough understanding of the key issues that are preventing sustained improvement in pupils' progress.
- I was interested to know if the curriculum was broad and balanced. You have recently reviewed how the curriculum is implemented. These changes will allow pupils to gain more experience in subjects such as art, music and drama in Year 9. This gives pupils a wider choice when they select their GCSE examination subjects. As well as providing a broad range of subjects, you ensure that all pupils have the option to complete the English Baccalaureate. As a result of these changes, the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils so that they are prepared for a broad range of post-16 pathways when they leave school. In the sixth form, there are a range of academic and vocational courses available for students. On occasions, this curriculum offer is enriched with bespoke courses which meet the needs of individual students and enhance their academic progress.
- I was also interested to know how you and other leaders spend additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Your assessment information shows that the difference in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in school and nationally is diminishing. This is the result of leaders' detailed individual intervention plans, which effectively identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and allow swift interventions to be put in place to address any weaknesses.
- The difference in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, and other pupils in school, is also reducing. This is because you accurately identify the barriers that prevent disadvantaged pupils from attending school regularly and learning well. You then use additional funding to remove these barriers. This has ensured that disadvantaged pupils' attendance is improving and moving closer to that of other pupils nationally.
- Through effective links with another local school, you can now provide more help and support for pupils that might otherwise be excluded. As a result, you have reduced the proportion of pupils excluded from school for a fixed period. In particular, there has been a significant reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions issued to disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders' systems for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching identify the main reasons why pupils do not make sustained good progress over time
- the quality of teaching improves by:

- raising teachers' expectations so that pupils are appropriately challenged to do their best
- ensuring that teachers plan work that takes account of what pupils already know so that pupils can build effectively on their prior learning
- sharing the strong practice in the school to reduce the inconsistencies in teaching.

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

Yours sincerely

Erica Sharman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we examined a range of documents, including: safeguarding records and policies; information on pupils' performance and attendance; and the school's action plans and leaders' self-evaluation.

We met with you and other members of your leadership team. I met with six members of the governing body, including the chair and the vice-chair.

We observed lessons with school leaders in several subject areas and looked at work in pupils' books. We spoke formally to groups of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 and informally to others around the school. We observed pupils' behaviour both in and out of lessons.

We reviewed the 34 responses to the pupils' survey and the 113 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We considered the 107 responses that parents submitted to the free-text service and considered the 54 responses to the staff questionnaire.