

## **Earl Sterndale C of E Primary School Chair's Report (July 2025)**

As the end of the 2024/25 academic year approaches, it is a good time to look back on what has been, yet again, a very busy, rewarding (and occasionally challenging) year for our school.

December 2024 saw Ofsted visit Earl Sterndale, which for all schools is a significant event, but can prove a stressful and demanding experience for all involved. With all the hard work and planning behind the scenes and a massive effort from all teaching staff and children over the two gruelling days, we retained our status as a 'Good' school (with only three recommended areas for improvement). This visit was not an easy experience for anyone, but as The Chair, I was proud and enthused by the individual staff, governing body and our school community as a whole who came together to support each other whilst working hard to ensure the ongoing stability of our school.

Once feedback from Ofsted was digested, development plans were put in place to make these changes without losing the uniqueness and special qualities of our fantastic school, and I thank all staff, Governors, parents (and the children) for their never-ending commitment, support and concerted positive efforts at this difficult time. From my own experience, the Headteacher and staff have always tailored the teaching experience to each individual child to ensure they remain safe and happy in school, whilst achieving their full potential in this preliminary stage of their educational journey. This should remain our strength as we move forward in the months (and years) ahead.

Of course, the other big news this year is the announcement that our long-standing Headteacher (Mr H) is leaving and will be taking his well-earned retirement at the end of this academic year, along with our two other very experienced teachers Mrs Gill and Mrs Plevy also deciding to step down from their current teaching and SEN roles at school. We are extremely sorry to be losing these established and committed members of our leadership and teaching team, and will miss them a great deal, but we wish them well in their future endeavours, and we thank them all for their years of dedication, hard work and commitment to our school and all the children they have taught. We would not be the school we are today without them! Mr H, we thank you for your dedication, passion for teaching and positive impact on our children and extended school community. Mrs Gill for your irrefutable commitment to SEN and your positive influence on our children's learning and development at that critical introduction to school, and Mrs Plevy for your boundless energy, enthusiasm and ability to make learning fun.

We are also really sorry to be losing Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Balfe and Mrs Barber at the end of this Summer term. We have been extremely lucky to have Mrs O'Neill's talented musical expertise over these past 8 years, with children (and their families) all benefitting from the positive influences that music, dance and performing have had alongside some unforgettable school performances. Mrs Balfe, just 'got' us from the moment she arrived, and has been an invaluable and positive, fun member of the team, contributing to the children's development and wellbeing. Whilst Mrs Barber, our hardworking and very willing Caretaker for the last three years, has also proved to be a great asset by keeping our school clean and safe. Always going above and beyond what is expected in her role, responding to the alarm at all hours of day and night, and even providing essential cover in the classroom during those first weeks of Covid. We thank them all wholeheartedly and wish them all the best in the future.

Spring 2025 saw Governors and staff moving forward to find a replacement Headteacher and teaching staff. After a rigorous recruitment process, we successfully recruited Mrs Humpleby as our new Headteacher. Mrs Cross was recruited as our full-time Key Stage 2 Teacher. We thank all staff and children for their support in this process at this emotive and uncertain time for everyone

involved. Both additions to our school team come to the Earl Sterndale School community with a wealth of experience and a real passion for the dynamics of a small school and the values that we want to retain. I would add that during this recruitment process we ensured we listened to all current staff, the opinions and concerns of our parents and more importantly the voices of our children as to the future look of Earl Sterndale School and kept them at the heart of all the changes we have had to make.

School finances have taken a welcome upturn due to some astute financial planning and a little luck resulting in a positive budget going forward. We shall be investing in new resources where necessary to address the improvements required by Ofsted with the guidance of existing and new staff. Our continued program to improve teaching support (TAs), learning resources, recreational equipment and exciting and varied learning experiences for the children remains the same. Thank you to all our amazing teaching assistants for their continued hard work, commitment, support and in being so flexible and accommodating throughout a very difficult year.

The school Fundraising Committee continues to work miracles to support, organise and deliver a diverse range of events across the year that are enjoyed by all who attend, as well as bringing in essential additional funds. These funds will continue to go directly to the children in the form of new resources and great experiences, so please continue to support them/us where you are able. You know who they are and a small thank you every now and again goes a long way for all their efforts and time given.

As the school moves into its next chapter, the governing body remains a well-balanced group of volunteers with the added benefit of four enthusiastic, positive new parent members. We are growing from strength to strength, so a big thank you to all parents, staff and volunteers who are willing and able to give up their time to help. All new starters and those with new roles are settling in well, attending induction training and contributing to the support of the school and its staff. Over the coming months this Governor support will be essential to undertake the transitions required. As always, I would like to take this opportunity to thank past governors for all their hard work and dedication during their terms of office. Our rock that is Mrs Hicks in the school office deserves a special thank you for keeping the ship sailing and on course considering the choppy water we are currently navigating. Also a very big thank you to our Mrs Foulkes (Clerk of Governors) for providing support and advice to meet all Local Authority guidelines, but is also a valued 'critical friend', as well as providing stronger links to the church community.

The church's equivalent to Ofsted (SIAMS), visited school recently and the feedback so far is very encouraging. Earl Sterndale Primary continues to deliver and support our Christian visions and values in everything we do. The visit itself was considered a much more positive and supportive experience. The report will be provided in due course and we hope to continue to improve our links with the church going forward. A big thank you to the 'team' who spent the day with the inspector, and not forgetting the children, who behaved impeccably and were a credit to the school.

Our children continue to be our best asset and from recent feedback and results gained, are making very good progress, and more importantly, are happy, safe and secure in our small school 'family'. All our Year 6 pupils who will be leaving us soon are ready for their ongoing journey to secondary school and we wish them every success in their future. As with every group that leaves us, they will be missed and will always be welcomed as part of the school community. We are also looking forward to meeting our Reception new starters and their families, and we know you will all make them feel very welcome!

Positive work completed over the last school year (2024/2025) has included:

- ✓ Completed our OFSTED & SIAMS inspections remaining 'GOOD'.
- ✓ Very positive SATS results.
- ✓ Year 6 writing assessments with good results.
- ✓ Recruitment of a new Headteacher and Key Stage 2 Teacher.
- ✓ Continuing to invest in our people with ongoing Staff and Governor training.
- ✓ Development Plan to improve the curriculum delivery.
- ✓ Increased Governor visits into School to monitor curriculum and behavior.
- ✓ Investment in our buildings and facilities.
- ✓ Continuing to improve and focus on our school's Visions and Values through our 'Making Good Decisions Together' principle which links to the community, safety, learning, behaviour, resilience and respect.
- ✓ Providing children with personal development opportunities and experiences above and beyond curriculum requirements, such as our White Hall Residential trip and other individual sessions (climbing and paddle boarding), Alton Towers for Year 5 and Year 6, Forest School for all years and the various school musical and dramatic performances that the children have all participated in.
- ✓ Children performing at the Pavillion Gardens in 'The Snowman' production that made the local radio and TV news.
- ✓ Strengthening of the governing body with four new enthusiastic parents to support the school going forward.

At the close of the school year, we have the school's 'Wizard of Oz' performance to look forward to, followed by the Y6 leavers' church service and party. This year will be a very poignant and heart-rending end to our school year as we say 'goodbye and good luck' to both our Y6s and some of our most cherished teaching staff, but it is also a time for reflecting and celebrating them and our fantastic school!

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all parents for their continued support during this, a difficult year, at Earl Sterndale Primary School. Please be reassured that we will continue to listen to you all to keep our school unique and special. Our new Headteacher and Staff members will need all our support to help them settle in to the new roles and environment, so my thanks in advance, as I know I can rely on you all to make them feel very welcome.

I sign off of course with a massive thank you to our very wonderful and most special Mr H, Mrs Gill, Mrs. Plevy, Mrs. Balfe, Mrs Barber and Mrs O'Neill. We thank you for all your hard work, dedication, care, support and commitment over the years, and we wish you all every luck and happiness in your retirements and future undertakings. We will miss you all so very much, so take care of you, as you have taken care of us, our school and of course our children!

Have a great summer holiday with your families. Take care and see you in September, ready for the next exciting chapter for all of us at Earl Sterndale School.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Swindell  
Chair of Governors