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Mr D Wallace
Headteacher
St Oswald's CofE Aided Primary School
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Dear Mr Wallace

Short inspection of St Oswald's CofE Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 March 2016, 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 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. When you were appointed as headteacher in 2014, you quickly identified what the school was doing well and where it could be improved. You have galvanised the community by establishing a new, shared vision so that everyone understands the school's identity and what you are collectively trying to achieve. Staff have welcomed the changes and share your ambition for success. Parents are also overwhelmingly supportive; the vast majority who shared their views say that children are happy and achieve well. Pupils arrive into the most welcoming environment every day and enjoy their learning and the positive and engaging relationships between themselves and staff. Pupils engage well in their learning because teaching is relevant and interesting. Their behaviour in classrooms, around school and outside is consistently positive.

At the previous inspection, the school's self-evaluation (its judgement on its performance) was described as thorough, honest and accurate. This continues to be the case. You have accurately judged how well the school is performing in all areas and your plans for improvement are focused around accurate priorities. We discussed how your plans could be sharpened to provide more measurable targets for each action point and how this would help governors to evaluate the school's ongoing progress.

The previous inspection also reported strength in the care, guidance and support

provided for pupils. Pupils spoken to confirm that this is still the case. Comments received from the vast majority of parents also make clear that pupils are well-looked-after. You work closely with parents as and when issues arise.

The 2010 report noted some areas in which the school could improve. One area was the achievement of most-able pupils. You have worked hard to address this issue and there are signs of success. For example, almost three quarters of the pupils who left the school in 2015 achieved higher levels than those expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics; this achievement was well above the national average. However, this success is not currently shared in all parts of the school, for example by pupils at the end of Key Stage 1. In 2015, the proportion of Year 2 pupils reaching the higher levels was not as high as that of pupils nationally. Work in pupils' books shows that more is expected from the most able and they complete tasks that challenge their thinking – proof that the school's action plan is having an impact. We did discuss, however, how all pupils, including the most able, would benefit from having more opportunities to reason mathematically and to solve complex problems to broaden and deepen their understanding of mathematics.

It was reported in the previous inspection that children in the early years needed to experience a wider range of purposeful activities that they could choose for themselves, both indoors and outdoors. This has certainly improved and children now have access to a wide range of activities, often planned around their own interests, such as superheroes or castles. We discussed how the outdoor area is not yet providing the same quality of opportunities as indoors; this is an aspect you are already aware of and have plans to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

There are well-established systems in place to keep children safe, for example the checks made on new members of staff before they are allowed to work with children. Records viewed on inspection show that, where pupils are potentially vulnerable, leaders act swiftly to protect them from harm, involving external agencies when necessary. Safeguarding records and policies are up to date and reflect the most recent government legislation. Pupils say that they feel safe – a view shared by the overwhelming majority of parents. Leaders emphasise the importance of regular attendance to parents. Overall, attendance is above average and very few pupils are absent for extended periods of time.

Inspection findings

- You have wasted no time in preparing the ground for improvement. Early on in your headship, you set about the task of providing clear direction to other leaders, governors and staff in your pursuit of excellence. A new model of governance has been established further to a review completed in 2015. This means that governors are now linked more closely with different aspects of school improvement and visit the school regularly to check on their areas of responsibility. You have also established a rigorous programme of evaluation, including regular visits to classrooms, considering progress in pupils' books, speaking to pupils about their learning and keeping a careful eye on pupils' outcomes. Signs of success are clear, such as the excellent outcomes for

pupils by the time they leave the school; they are very well prepared for the next stage in their learning. There are also signs of improvement in all other areas of school, seen in the progress made by current pupils.

- Leaders have correctly identified an improvement in standards in the early years. Valuable and effective support has been commissioned from a local authority consultant to help develop this provision. Children now have access to a wider range of tasks which they can access and complete more independently. Children are motivated to learn because staff pay attention to their interests and incorporate these into the classroom wherever possible. For example, boys were engaged in activities involving building a castle to reflect a current topic and other children enjoyed building a cave outside when completing work around the Easter story. The teacher uses her ongoing checks of children's learning well to plan activities which help to move learning on. This is one of the main reasons why the outcomes for children at the end of early years have improved over the last three years.
- All pupils' progress is now more consistent. Historic performance information suggests that pupils fare very well in Key Stage 2, but have not been as successful in the other key stages. You have concentrated efforts across the school to establish a consistent approach to teaching, such as introducing whole-school changes to marking and the setting of targets in lessons. This, along with your regular checks on the quality of teaching and on pupils' progress, is starting to pay dividends. Children's outcomes in the early years are improving and evidence from your own assessments and pupils' work observed show that pupils in Key Stage 1 are making strong progress this year. We agreed that not all teachers consistently follow the school's marking policy and how this would need to be a continued area of focus for you.
- Records indicate that, in the main, disadvantaged pupils make good progress. A new system has been established to oversee the provision for these pupils more closely. This allows the leader to see at a glance what types of support are in place to enable pupils to achieve well. An overview document holds a record of pupils' current achievements and provides an opportunity for leaders to check on the progress being made by disadvantaged pupils during the academic year. We discussed how the document could be improved by noting any changes to the support provided if your checks on learning suggest that progress is less than expected.
- Changes have been made to the teaching of mathematics. There are good examples of pupils being challenged in mathematics at the level of their abilities, but also for them to 'have a go' at more challenging work. For example, a pupil who would normally access learning at a particular level might now try to access work at a higher level. Similarly, if a most-able pupil is not too sure about a new aspect of learning, they might complete more basic work at first and then move on to more challenging work when they have mastered the basic approach. Pupils also have some opportunities to reason and think deeply about their mathematical understanding and to solve

complex mathematical problems. We discussed how it would be helpful for these opportunities to be more commonplace in some classes, especially for your most-able pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- action plans, including those to raise achievement for disadvantaged pupils, are refined so that expected targets are made clearer and governors can more easily check on pupils' progress over time
- the outdoor provision in the early years is further developed, so that children have similar opportunities for learning outside as they do inside
- all teachers consistently follow the school's agreed marking policy
- all pupils, particularly the most able, are given more opportunities to reason about their mathematical thinking and to solve mathematical problems.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Chester, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hardman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher, the early years leader and six governors. I spoke with pupils informally, both in and outside of classrooms and I also spoke with an adviser from the local authority. I considered a wide range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, school development plan, documents relating to safeguarding, minutes from governing body meetings and information relating to pupils' progress. I visited every class with you to observe teaching, to speak with pupils about their learning and to check progress in books. I considered 39 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire, read two letters sent in by parents and spoke to three parents who were dropping pupils off at school.