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Mrs Gill White
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs White

Short inspection of St Oswald's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 February 2017, 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your leadership team and your staff ensure that St Oswald's CofE Primary School is a highly inclusive school where every child matters. Your pupils are happy, enjoy learning and behave extremely well. This is because pupils know that they are each valued for their uniqueness and that you, and your staff, believe in each of them. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and parents also believe that the school brings out the best in their children. Parents are proud of the school and many of them wanted to celebrate the work of your staff during the inspection. Without doubt, pupils right across the school are focused on their learning because staff challenge them to do their very best. You certainly fulfil your mission to 'provide a happy, safe and highly stimulating environment where children can learn effectively'.

The school's curriculum underpins this stimulating environment and it sparks the imagination of its pupils. You, and your staff, are committed to offering first-hand experiences to support pupils' development. All around the school is evidence of beautiful art work, designed and produced by pupils. Pupils relish the opportunity, for example, to visit the Stott Park Bobbin Mill and Kendal Castle, where they combine the study of local history with an opportunity to develop their art skills.

Teachers harness pupils' passion for art and use it as a hook to develop wider skills, for example, writing. In key stage 2, pupils undertook an art project on perspective. They drew long corridors in an old house. The theme of suspense captured pupils' imagination so well that it influenced the quality of their writing, which was excellent. Pupils' use of sound, smell and description was highly effective.

Aside from art, pupils' wider spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well developed. Strong Christian values are at the heart of the school's culture and pupils regularly engage in reflection on the world around them. Pupils also have rich opportunities to engage with music, for example with the Manchester Choir. Added to this, pupils develop their resilience and teamwork skills in a range of sports. Perhaps most impressive, however, is the school's commitment to internationalism. St Oswald's has strong links with schools in the USA. Pupils from both countries regularly play a game of chess over the internet. They also correspond with one another via email. Other fascinating work includes the Global Monster Project, which enables pupils from across the globe to collaborate. The school won the competition in 2016. An Italian teacher exchange also provides pupils with an opportunity to immerse themselves in Italian food and culture. All of these rich experiences enhance pupils' learning and progress.

Across the school, leaders, including the governing body, have also taken effective action since the last inspection to address the areas for improvement. You, and your senior team, have developed better monitoring systems and now analyse data effectively to improve learning and progress for pupils. The outcomes that pupils achieve continue to be good across most subjects in key stages 1 and 2 and they are excellent in reading. In early years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is also improving rapidly. Teachers have high expectations and aspirations for pupils and they are now planning more effectively for the different ability groups within their classes to ensure good learning and progress. This includes the most able pupils. More pupils are now reaching the highest standards, especially in reading and writing. The school's assessment systems are now more robust and they allow teachers to identify and address misconceptions in pupils' learning more quickly and effectively. Leaders, however, rightly recognise the need to review and evaluate regularly the teaching of mathematics so that outcomes consistently match those of reading and writing by the end of key stage 2.

Since you took up post as headteacher in 2016, you have rightly wasted no time in establishing the school's key areas of strength and those areas in need of further development. Your leadership is strong and insightful. You, and your leadership team, have an accurate view of the quality of education provided by the school. As such, your action plans are focused and robust. You have, for example, been proactive in brokering support from the local authority to provide additional training to the governing body. You have correctly analysed the school's data and information to see where most improvement is needed. Parents, pupils and staff recognise the impact you have already had in a short space of time. They say that you have already made a positive difference to the school. They appreciate your passion and commitment to every child.

During the inspection, we discussed your school improvement plan and the next steps for the school to improve further. First, you acknowledge that pupils need to develop further their reasoning skills in mathematics. This is so that when they attempt more complex, unfamiliar mathematical problems, they use their prior learning to solve more difficult problems. Second, you acknowledge that you need to review and evaluate the teaching of phonics regularly to high standards of learning and progress. This review is also to ensure that every child succeeds in the screening check by the end of Year 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements across the school, including in early years, are robust and fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Your staff receive regular training on how to spot signs and symptoms of abuse. You have undertaken additional higher level safeguarding training to ensure that you keep abreast of the most recent changes to practice. Most recently, you have reviewed and updated the school's risk assessments to ensure their continued effectiveness. On finding a weakness with site security, you took immediate action to address the shortfall. Pupils and parents are pleased that you have taken such steps.

Inspection findings

- Since your appointment, you have rightly focused on ensuring that children have access to the best possible continuous provision in early years. Most recently, the school acquired the pre-school from an external provider. Already, this has had a striking effect on the children's development. Leaders and teachers are able to assess the children's developmental needs from a much earlier age and they are able to put plans into place to address any shortfalls. The curriculum provision is now highly effective because teachers know each child from the age of two and can now plan their early years curriculum to maximise children's learning and development.
- Parents are unreservedly positive about the progress their children make in early years. They say that teaching and learning are good and that relationships are strong. In an early years session, two- and three-year-old children were thoroughly engaged in hunting for bears in the school's woodland. The lesson was linked to a book that children had been reading and effectively built on their prior learning. It also focused on number. Teachers and teaching assistants carefully modelled key language from the book, for example, 'squishy' and 'squelchy'. The children, through careful planning for learning, were immersed in an environment where they had to think for themselves. The children showed curiosity for the world around them; they were excited.

- The systems you use to track children's progress in early years are detailed and robust. You ensure that the moderation procedures you use are also effective. You and your early years leader regularly evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that children receive high-quality provision. Teachers' and teaching assistants' ongoing training is a key strength. Because of the changes you have rightly made to provision, it is expected that over three quarters of pupils will achieve a good level of development this year.
- The teaching of phonics is good. Leaders recognise that this is an area of ongoing development because they will not rest until every child reaches the required standard. Although teachers plan effectively for pupils' progress in phonics, there are still more opportunities to enable pupils to make faster progress by stretching and challenging them to think independently of the teacher. Since your appointment, you have rightly increased the proportion of phonics teaching so that you continue to raise standards in phonics. You also regularly review and evaluate the impact of the changes you have made.
- You have rightly focused on improving pupils' handwriting across the school, especially that of boys. Work scrutiny and observations in lessons show that pupils' handwriting is consistently good across the school. This has a positive effect on the quality of pupils' writing. In Year 3 and Year 4, pupils have written alternative versions of fairy tales. The quality of writing was very good; boys in particular made strong progress.
- Projected outcomes for 2017 and the school's own tracking systems show that all groups of pupils, including boys and the most able, are on track to make good progress. The standards pupils achieve in key stage 1 continue to be broadly in line with the national average and by the end of key stage 2, at least 80% should achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Predictions also show that by the end of key stage 2, there should be a good proportion of pupils achieving the highest standard in reading and writing and slightly fewer in mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to evaluate and review the effectiveness of the teaching of phonics to ensure consistently high standards
- teachers further develop pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics so that pupils tackle more complex, unfamiliar problems with success.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Smart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, parents of pupils from the school, your early years leader and members of the governing body. Also, I held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. In addition, I met formally with a group of pupils from across the school and talked informally with others around the school and in lessons. I listened to pupils read. Furthermore, I observed teaching and learning in key stage 1, key stage 2 and in early years. I examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, attendance information, pupils' assessment information, a range of policies, your evaluation of how well the school is performing and your school improvement plan. I also undertook a review of the school's website. As part of the inspection, I considered 17 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey, 15 responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text service and 10 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.