

St Oswald's CofE Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130929
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	315661
Inspection dates	14–15 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Diane Auton

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	121
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Chris Reeves
Headteacher	Mrs Phillippa Rowe
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2003
School address	Grove Road Mollington Chester Cheshire CH1 6LG
Telephone number	01244 851642
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school is located in a relatively socially and economically advantaged village on the outskirts of Chester. Most pupils are White British, a below average proportion have learning difficulties and/or disabilities with a very small number of statements of special educational need. The number of pupils in each year group varies from year to year. The school population is now stable after a period of high mobility at the time of the previous inspection. A new headteacher, previously the school's deputy headteacher, was appointed in April 2007. The school holds the Healthy Schools' Award and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Oswald's is a good school where pupils do well both academically and personally. By the time they leave Year 6, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and have gained life skills that will serve them well in the future. Academic and personal development are promoted simultaneously. This was expressed in a typical parental comment that the school 'produces well rounded children who are polite and helpful and who are inquisitive learners'. At the end of Year 6 overall academic standards are above average. Pupils make good gains in their personal standards, including a good awareness of how to keep healthy, a sense of citizenship developed through taking on personal responsibility and good habits of punctuality and attendance.

Most children have attended pre-school provision before they enter the Foundation Stage so that they start school with positive attitudes to learning. They establish their early learning skills securely in the Reception class and make good progress. Good teaching and a good curriculum here and throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 are central to pupils' enjoyment and achievements. Their enjoyment is evident both in lessons, reflecting the care teachers give to planning lessons that interest them and keep them actively involved, and in their keen participation in extra-curricular activities. High standards are sustained in Key Stage 1 and 2, and pupils achieved well in national assessment in 2007. Pastoral care is good and pupils know that the adults in school care about them and support them well. In discussion, they wholeheartedly agreed with a comment from one that 'teachers will always help you to sort your problems out'.

The headteacher has maintained the quality of provision through a period of staffing difficulties, with the help and support of governors and of staff at all levels in the school. Plans to restructure staffing and leadership are currently on hold, pending the return of permanently employed staff from long-term leave. In the interim period key responsibilities have been shared across the staff team on a temporary basis. High standards have been maintained and this is strong evidence of the effectiveness of the measures taken and of the commitment of staff and governors to the pupils and the school. Individual staff have gained valuable leadership and management experience during this period. Although the quality of teaching and learning is monitored regularly by the headteacher, with support from the local authority, subject leaders have not yet fully developed their role in assuring the quality of provision. Senior staff posts with responsibilities for monitoring and directing particular aspects of the school's work are not yet in place. The impact of the unresolved staffing issues is seen more in terms of limiting curriculum innovation and guiding intervention to ensure consistency of practice in some areas, rather than on pupils' standards and achievement. Nevertheless, the current situation weakens aspects of strategic management. For example, it has not yet been possible to extend the good practice developed in tracking pupils' progress to include science, although in English and mathematics progress is tracked well. There is recognition of these overall and specific weaknesses, which are priority areas for action in the coming year.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children's attainment on entry to the Reception class is above average expectations for their age. The small team of staff in the Foundation Stage is well led and coordinated and the children benefit from the good personal support they are given and from warm relationships in the

classroom. This enables them to settle quickly into their new surroundings, to feel secure and happy and ready to carry on learning. Their positive attitudes and the good teaching they receive underpin their enjoyment and good achievements during their first year in school. The curriculum meets their learning and personal development needs and activities to establish early literacy skills are particularly effective. Opportunities are provided for adult-led activities and also for children to make independent choices and decisions and to enjoy investigative play. The use of the outdoor area to present the curriculum is not fully developed. Assessment is informative, the children's progress is tracked carefully and the information gained is used well in planning the next steps in teaching and learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the roles of subject leaders and create senior staff posts in order to support the process of assuring the quality of provision in the school.
- Implement systems to track progress and attainment in science.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Good progress in all areas of the curriculum is sustained throughout Key Stage 1 and pupils build well on what they have learned in the Foundation Stage. As the result of good provision, standards at the end of Year 2 are above the national average and are particularly high in reading. In Key Stage 2 the school's tracking data show good progress in English and mathematics, with pupils reaching challenging targets in all year groups. The school is developing systems to track progress in science, and, although these are not yet in place, work in pupils' books provides evidence of good progress. The exceptionally small pupil cohort in Year 6 in 2007 achieved well overall in national tests and very well in English. The small proportion of pupils with additional learning needs make good progress in relation to their abilities and starting points as a result of the good provision the school makes for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is good. They express clear views on moral issues, understanding, for example, why racism and bullying are unacceptable. Pupils say that the school helps them sort out problems well. They understand the purposes of the simple behaviour code and appreciate its positive incentives and rewards for good behaviour. They are encouraged to be reflective and the curriculum and assemblies also contribute to their awareness of major world faiths and cultures. They readily take on responsibilities as monitors and as fundraisers for good causes and for play equipment. The school council is influential and pupils feel their views are taken seriously. There are good opportunities to be active and the strong focus on healthy living was exemplified in the recent successful Healthy School Week. Pupils have a good awareness of environmental issues and are enthusiastic recyclers. Older pupils act as Road Safety Officers and show good awareness of safety issues. Good basic skills and plentiful opportunities for teamwork prepare pupils well for the future. Good attendance reflects home-school relationships that are predominantly positive.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching enables pupils to progress well. Careful planning ensures that the learning needs of pupils of different ages and abilities are taken into consideration. This is a complex challenge in a small school with several mixed-age classes, but teachers deal with this well and their success can be measured in the high standards pupils reach at the end of each key stage. Assessment is thorough and this helps staff to plan units of work and to target support accurately. Good interventions from skilled teaching assistants help to ensure that pupils with additional learning needs are supported and make good progress. Effective teamwork between class teachers and teaching assistants is a feature of many lessons and has a positive impact on learning and progress. Pupils enjoy their lessons because their interests are successfully engaged, although the pace of learning is sometimes reduced when explanations and introductory sessions are too lengthy. Behaviour is good in lessons and pupils concentrate and apply themselves well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum supports pupils' personal development well. Good provision for literacy and numeracy is reflected in high standards. The absence of tracking progress in science prevents a clear overview of the impact of provision in the subject. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well as a teaching and learning aid across the subjects to add interest and enjoyment and pupils' ICT skills are also developed well. Work has begun on linking subjects together in themes and this is having a positive impact on capturing pupils' interests. There is good provision for pupils to learn about healthy lifestyle issues and about personal safety. Music is a strong feature of the curriculum, with a large proportion of pupils enjoying instrumental tuition and learning to perform to a high standard. French is taught in Key Stage 2, and this is supported by links with the high school. A range of popular after-school clubs includes creative nature, dance and football. A full programme of visitors and visits, including residential trips for older pupils, adds further enrichment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils report that they feel they are cared for well and given good support by staff. In turn, they are encouraged to be mutually supportive and helpful and the well trained playtime buddies from upper Key Stage 2 provide good care for the younger children. Safeguarding and child protection requirements are met. Pupils know their individual learning targets and are given a clear understanding of the purposes of their learning activities. Good guidance for pupils to improve their work is provided through the recently revised marking policy and this is having a very positive impact in several classes, although the policy is not yet consistently applied across the school. Additional support and good planning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enable them to access the curriculum and make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Long-term absences of key staff over the last eighteen months left minimal support for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance. High standards have been sustained throughout this period. This is a testament to the effectiveness and commitment of the staff, who have taken on additional roles and responsibilities to cover for absent colleagues. An interim senior management team has gained in confidence and experience. These factors, together with the headteacher's good leadership, contribute to the school's capacity to secure further improvement. Its leaders know the school well and correctly identify its strengths and areas for development. Challenging targets are set with detailed action plans for their achievement. The school has an accurate overview of standards and progress in most areas of its operations, as the result of monitoring carried out by the headteacher, with support from the local authority. Further work remains to develop middle management's quality assurance role and this is a school priority for the coming months. Resources are used well and the attractive learning environment has been further enhanced by the addition of an ICT suite. The supportive governing body is actively involved with the daily life of the school and is developing its capacity to become more greatly involved in monitoring and evaluating the school's work.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of St Oswald's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Chester, CH1 6LG

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. As you know, I came to see how well the school is doing and how you are all getting on with your learning. I really enjoyed meeting you and chatting with you and finding out about all the good things that happen at your school.

I was very impressed by how well you all get on together, by how friendly and kind everyone is at your school and by how the grown-ups in school take good care of you. I was pleased to see how good you are at taking on responsibility and helping to make the school run well. I also saw how hard you work in your lessons and how you concentrate well. The staff teach you well and do a great job in making your lessons interesting. All of these things are helping you to be successful learners and to reach good standards in your work, and I was very pleased to see this.

St Oswald's is a good school and I have asked your headteacher and the staff to do two things to make it even better.

- To keep a track of your progress in science, using a method similar to the good one that they use to track how you're getting on in maths and English.
- For the senior staff to become more involved in looking carefully at all areas of the school's work, to see what's working well and what might need improving.

Please keep up your good work and carry on being happy learners! With my very best wishes for the future.