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2 February 2016

Mr Steven Elliott
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Elliott

Short inspection of Overchurch Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 19 January 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 previous inspection. You have taken clear and thoughtful steps to establish a renewed vision and direction for the school since beginning your headship in September 2015. You have been careful, helping staff to identify what the school has already achieved as well as what can make it even better. It is clear to me that you have steadily and carefully built on your existing knowledge of the school from your previous role as deputy headteacher. In the past few weeks, you have started to work with a deputy headteacher who is new to the school. As one member of staff described it to me, you have 'gelled together' well. Staff are looking forward to the future; they feel well led and supported.

One of the most striking aspects of your school that I noted during the inspection was the high level of care, thought and consideration given to individual children across the school. As an infant school, this is nurturing, settling and growing the confidence and feelings of children from Nursery through to Year 2. The school is calm, children are focused fully on their learning and there is a strong feeling of a shared approach throughout. It is so encouraging to see that this has remained a central strength of the school since the previous inspection.

You are creating a school that is confident to deal with the digital age. Your emphasis on using social media to enhance communication with families is welcomed by parents, staff and governors. A range of information and communication technology is being used well to support learning throughout the school. It is very evident that you take your responsibility for e-safety very seriously, as shown by your workshops for parents, training for staff, and your rapid updates of information on the school website. This all shows the new confidence of the school in this aspect of its work.

When an inspector last visited the school in 2010, the work of the Nursery and Reception classes was less successful than in other parts of the school. This is no longer the case. Decisive action by leaders, staff and governors has significantly improved teaching and learning for the youngest children.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that arrangements for children's care and protection are up to date and relevant to the needs of the school. The successful work of staff to develop healthy relationships and value individual children underpins the school's approach to safeguarding. The school website explains safeguarding very clearly through a document aimed at parents. Leaders make sure that staff training in child protection is updated regularly. At appropriate intervals, a range of leaders attend updated training about the coordination of safeguarding. Staff know about the different types of abuse and what might indicate that a child is at risk of harm. They know how to report any concerns they may have about children, families or colleagues. They know about wider risks to children and the requirement to keep them safe from developing extremist views. A range of staff are trained in safe recruitment so that the expertise is not held by only one person. All appropriate checks are in place to check the suitability of staff at the start of their employment, as well as throughout their time working at the school. Clear records are kept to show that staff are recruited safely. Checks of suitability cover all relevant staff, including specialist sports coaches and teaching assistants. Appropriate steps are taken to supervise volunteers who work in the school. Staff record concerns about any individual in writing, so that emerging issues can be tracked and reviewed by leaders. Confidential records are stored securely.

Inspection findings

- You have a clear and informed understanding of the work of the school. While you are able to draw upon your successful experience as deputy head teacher in the school, it is evident that you have deepened your insights much further since taking up the post of head teacher in September 2015. You are clear about where teaching is strongest in the school and where additional support is assisting improvement. You believe in the ability of all your staff to succeed.

- You have set out your vision very clearly to staff about how you plan to take the school forward. Staff welcome your focus on developing their professional skills and knowledge as well as your challenge to them about the need to understand learning as well as teaching. You have identified that a key step to further strengthening the work of staff is to increase links between Overchurch and other schools, including beyond Wirral. This has the potential to bring benefits through additional challenge and review of the school's work.
- The large majority of parents are fully supportive of the school. Some would like more information and explanation about their children's work. In response, you have increased the ways in which the school communicates with parents on changes within classes and children's progress. The school website includes a good range of clear information for parents. You are keen to do more and welcome hearing from parents on how to strengthen the work of the school. During your first term as headteacher, you formally consulted parents for their views of the school. You have reviewed and used this information already as part of your vision for moving the school forward.
- You value the contributions and support of your staff, such as the insights of your coordinator for the early years and the overview held by your mathematics coordinator. Your relationship with your new deputy headteacher is full of potential and you complement each other's skills well.
- The school environment displays pupils' creative model characters and model faces very well. Not only are these displayed with care, but the standard of artistry and skill involved is high. This shows that Overchurch is a school where there are high expectations of what pupils can do and that pupils' individual work is valued.
- Through carefully planned changes in resourcing, staffing and leadership of the early years classes, the school has created provision that gives Nursery and Reception children a good start to their learning and development. Staff have much-increased opportunities to contribute, review and develop this part of the school. Over the last three years, this work has noticeably reduced the gap between the attainment of girls and boys aged five years. Importantly, a large majority of children now leave the Reception Year ready for learning in Year 1.
- The curriculum is planned well to grab children's interests. For example, at the time of the inspection, Reception Year children were absorbed in a topic about 'The Gingerbread Man', who had recently escaped the custody of adults in the school. This led to much concerned quizzing of adults by children and follow-up discussion, investigation and keen writing. Attractive classroom displays about the subject kept children thinking about the important matters at hand.
- In science, older children are being inspired through their exploration related to astronauts and the solar system. During the inspection, children and parents commented very positively on these lessons to me. You have some exciting plans for taking this learning forward.

- Children are proud to be pupils at Overchurch Infants. They enjoy lessons, cooperate well and show high levels of independence. Behaviour around the school is excellent because of the highly skilled, patient help and support given by staff. Pupils are polite, friendly, inquisitive and keen to learn.
- The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. There is a wide range of planned trips, such as to meet older people. Pupils also meet visitors and learn about a range of religions. An innovative project promotes core school values. Pupils on the school council, helped by a professional artist, designed a set of superheroes for the school. These characters represent valued attributes, such as determination and equality, in a way ideally suited to three- to seven-year-olds. The superheroes celebrate disability, gender and ethnicity very positively. They are already much liked and discussed by the wider group of school pupils and staff.
- The school endeavours to encourage and recognise effort by pupils, which is celebrated across the school. This includes a '20th child award', which celebrates the contribution of pupils who do something extra and unprompted because they feel they should.
- Leaders and staff have maintained the good quality of teaching in the school so that pupils continue to achieve above the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Following a 2015 dip in the results of the Year 1 phonics screening check, which determines how well pupils link letters and sounds, leaders have acted quickly to review phonics teaching. Arrangements already in place in Year 2 are responsible for a track record of helping children to catch up quickly. You have identified that reducing the variation between the achievement of some disadvantaged children and other children, particularly in mathematics, is a priority for the school. A good range of actions are in place to improve pupils' progress and address these issues.
- Extra government funding to increase pupils' skills and participation in competitive sport is being used successfully. Staff are learning new skills by observing and teaching alongside professional coaches. This is adding much to pupils' achievement in their physical skills and competitive abilities.
- The attendance of pupils is in line with the national average: it is not as high as you and governors wish. You have identified a range of causes of pupils' absence and a clear plan is in place to raise attendance further. You are sharing with parents how such absences equate to time lost for learning. You are looking for as many opportunities as possible to celebrate pupils' good attendance while liaising with families more closely whenever issues arise.
- The governing body is extremely proud of the school, both in the work of the previous headteacher, and in the new vision and direction being taken by you as the new headteacher. Members of the governing body represent a wide range of valuable expertise. Governors are unafraid to ask questions and challenge leaders where appropriate.

- Governors take their responsibilities seriously. For example, governors made sure that the recent headteacher and deputy headteacher appointment panels included different members of the governing body. Succession planning for the role of Chair of the Governing Body has been considered very carefully, ensuring that change is planned and shaped around the needs of the school.
- The governing body reviews the work of the school carefully and thoroughly. Members are keen to develop this even more with you. The governing body has recently benefited from reviewing its own work. It has used the '20 questions every governing board should ask itself', as listed by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance and Leadership. This shows a willingness to improve as well as to learn from national evidence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- links are established with other schools locally and further afield to benefit the ongoing review and refinement of teaching, learning and assessment at Overchurch Infants
- planned actions to improve the progress made by disadvantaged children lead to their attaining at the same high level as their peers.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Wirral metropolitan borough council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss your reviews of the school, your priorities and your vision for the future. You and I observed a range of teaching across classrooms, spoke to children and looked at the work being completed. We looked at the environment within classrooms and corridors. We discussed improvements in teaching and learning in the school since the previous inspection and the impact on pupils' progress. I spoke to a sample of staff, including checking their knowledge of safeguarding. I checked the school records of checks on staff suitability and asked you and a senior administrator about these records. I met with seven members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I reviewed the views of parents that were shared through Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I met some parents at the start of the inspection.