

Overleigh St Mary's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111290
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310558
Inspection dates	20–21 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Gill Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	505
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mrs Elaine Devine
Date of previous school inspection	24 February 2004
School address	Old Wrexham Road Handbridge Chester Cheshire CH4 7HS
Telephone number	01244 674001
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger-than-average primary school situated close to the city of Chester. Children from a neighbouring infant school join in Year 3, substantially increasing numbers in Key Stage 2.

Children of families from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds attend the school. The majority of children are of White British heritage. A small number of children are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average and a small number of these have statements of special educational need.

The school has been awarded the Artsmark Gold, Activemark Gold and a number of other accreditations including Investors in People. It provides breakfast and after-school care.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Overleigh St Mary's is a good school. It is improving rapidly and has outstanding features. There have been significant changes since the last inspection to staffing and in the loss of a unit for children with moderate learning difficulties. Following the retirement of the previous headteacher and deputy headteacher, a new headteacher was appointed in 2004 followed by a new deputy headteacher in 2006. Together, they are successfully driving the school forward with a strong vision of 'children first', which permeates the life of the school. There is an effective staff team and the impact of their creativity and high expectations is showing in the results children are starting to achieve. Children, parents, staff and governors are proud of their school and highly committed to its success.

Standards are above average and achievement is good. Children make good progress in Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, reaching standards at the end of Year 2 that are above the national average. In Year 3, Overleigh children are joined by children from a neighbouring infant school, increasing the year group by two thirds. This transition is managed successfully by the new leadership. Consequently, standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have risen to above the national average, with the most able achieving outstandingly well. The school's records of children's progress and children's exercise books show that most children are making good progress and are on track to meet challenging targets. Children who have learning difficulties and those who have English as an additional language benefit from well planned support and extra attention from highly effective support staff.

Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding. They are socially adept and well aware of how to keep healthy and safe. Behaviour is excellent. Children have a positive attitude to learning and take good care of each other. They know their responsibilities and make an outstanding contribution through the school council and ECO group to the life of the school and local community. Children in Year 6 take on an extraordinary range of responsibilities enthusiastically, enabling them to practise the skills needed for adult life.

The curriculum is outstanding. A great deal of thought and effort has gone into providing children with excellent opportunities to practise basic skills within a range of interesting lessons. This imaginative curriculum, with its emphasis on the arts and using the locality to capture the interests of the children, makes a strong contribution to the improvement in standards, particularly in writing. Teaching is good. Some of the teaching is outstanding, although occasionally work is not always matched closely enough to the learning needs of all the children.

The new leadership team was formed in September 2007, with the appointment of several new year-group leaders. This senior leadership team, sharing the strong vision of the head and deputy, is now making rapid progress in developing leadership at all levels and rigorously tracking children's progress. Subject leaders make a strong contribution. The morale of staff is high. The school has ambitious plans for development. However, senior staff do not yet fully evaluate all the available evidence to ensure improvement plans deliver better outcomes for children. Outstanding partnerships have been developed with parents, other schools, and agencies. These are very clearly aimed at providing the best quality of education for the children. The school provides good value for money and has a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Most children enter the Foundation Stage (Reception class) having previously attended a local pre-school setting. The levels of development on entry are broadly within the range expected for children of this age. They make good progress in Reception, particularly in the areas of language and personal social development. The opportunities to learn through play are enhanced by good quality resources, highly imaginative role play and some outstanding teaching. Opportunities for outside play are less well developed, but the school has plans of good quality to tackle this. Relationships are good and the Foundation Stage is well led and managed. Children love school. They are cared for exceptionally well and their development is thoroughly assessed and recorded. They are well prepared for starting the Year 1 curriculum. Partnership with parents is good. Induction is managed well and staff respond effectively to the needs of individuals to ensure all children feel comfortable, secure and well prepared for learning during their first year at school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure work is always well matched to children's abilities.
- Make more effective use of available evidence to inform school development planning and deliver even better outcomes for children.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children enter Year 1 with levels of development that meet or exceed the levels expected for children of their age. Since the last inspection, standards at Key Stage 1 have been consistently above average. Children achieve well. Standards in writing in 2007 were well above the national average.

Standards at Key Stage 2 are consistently above the national average and have improved. In 2007 the proportion of children reaching an above average standard for their age (Level 5) was significantly above the national average, showing good improvement since the last inspection. Overall, children achieve well.

The school assimilates children who join the school at age 7 well and there is no discernable difference in achievement by the time children reach Year 6. The new leadership has improved transition arrangements, including the rigorous tracking and assessment of children's progress. The quality of work in children's exercise books and the school's own records of children's progress show quite clearly that most children are on track to meet challenging targets. Children with special educational needs and those who have English as an additional language achieve as well as the others.

The standards achieved in art, music and drama are exceptionally high and contribute strongly to the standards being achieved across the curriculum.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Children enjoy school and attendance is well above the national average. Children know how to keep fit and healthy. Many eat salads at lunchtime and are active during breaks.

Children feel safe. They are confident that adults will help them to resolve any problems which arise, but they say it is rarely necessary.

Children's behaviour is excellent. They work well together in lessons and are generally confident learners. They have a strong sense of responsibility and are keen to help others. This is seen, for instance, by the charity work they carry out on their own initiative. Older children are aware that they are role models for the younger children and take this aspect of school life very seriously. Children are keen to participate in the exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular activities the school offers. They appreciate the residential visits where they are presented with a series of challenges and work together to complete them.

The school council is influential. Children conduct their own meetings and are proud of their achievements. Children appreciate the ECO group, where they work together to care for the environment and hold family days to make improvements to the school grounds.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Some teaching is outstanding. Typically, teaching is imaginative and engages the children's interest. Teachers have high expectations of what children can achieve and children rise well to the challenge. They are prepared to make mistakes in order to learn. Relationships are good. Classrooms and corridors are rich with display of children's work and as a result of some highly skilled specialist teaching, there is outstanding achievement in art and music. Resources such as interactive whiteboards are used effectively. The introduction of 'shoulder partners', where children talk to each other to check that they have made sense of their learning, is effective.

Where teaching is less effective, it is mainly because all the children are set the same task. The level of challenge for the more able children is good, but for children who are not confident learners, the small steps they need to support their progress are not in place. In some lessons, teaching did not take into account what children already knew and as a result, progress slowed. Skilled teaching assistants are deployed well to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an exceptionally good curriculum. It is broad, well planned, interesting and very relevant to children's aptitudes and interests. The key skills in English, mathematics, and information and communication technology (ICT) are provided effectively. These key skills are practised in other subjects such as science, history and geography. Excellent use is made of the immediate locality. For example, the school boasts a nesting box with a web-cam link and a duck house, where children carry out regular observations. The curriculum raises children's aspirations; for example, some had the opportunity to talk to a Russian cosmonaut in space via a satellite link. Excellent use is made of the culturally diverse nature of the school population. For example, 'Smok the dragon' (a Polish tale) was used as a literacy focus and life-size clay models of Chinese warriors formed the basis of multicultural work. As one child said, 'we share each other's cultures'.

The school provides regular enrichment afternoons and an exceptional range of extra-curricular activities, which includes brass band, yoga, sword fencing and several singing groups. Residential visits provide children with opportunities to complete team challenges, developing and practising the communication skills they will need throughout their lives.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support the school provides is good overall. The pastoral care and support is excellent. Strong relationships are a feature of the school. All staff know the children well and really do put the 'children first'. Parents' views are extremely positive; they say their children are very happy. They appreciate family learning days and the 'green group'. Parents are pleased with the adaptations made to the homework policy following consultation. There is a high level of parental satisfaction. The 'solution orientated schools' facility for children who need extra help in dealing with problems is valued highly.

The guidance children receive to help them with their learning is good. Marking is regular and generally positive. Some children know their learning targets, but this varies between classes. There are pockets of excellent practice, where children know the level at which they are working and what they need to do to achieve the next step. Recent improvements made to tracking children's progress is already leading to better achievement. The planning and monitoring of support for children with special educational needs is excellent.

The school meets all the current safeguarding and health and safety requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The leadership team of the headteacher and new deputy headteacher is highly effective. They share a strong strategic vision, are transforming underachievement and have tackled difficult issues efficiently to ensure the best possible outcomes for children. They are successful in motivating staff and morale is high.

Leadership is developing well at all levels. In 2007 the new senior management team was formed. This team now monitors children's progress rigorously and are keen to secure better outcomes for all children. Performance management is used effectively. Subject leaders are highly skilled and are now starting to take responsibility for monitoring children's progress in the subjects they manage. Leadership has ambitious plans for future improvement and has set challenging targets. However, it does not always use all the available evidence to check that the school's plans for improvement are effectively improving outcomes for children.

The leadership has developed outstandingly good partnerships with other schools, universities and local organisations. These are highly effective and are being used well to enhance the provision within school. Governance is good. Governors bring a variety of skills and are aware of what needs to be done to improve outcomes for children. However, they are in the early stages of holding the school accountable for standards and achievement.

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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?	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	1
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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Overleigh St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Chester, CH4 7HS

You may remember that Mrs Welch, Mrs Ravey and I visited your school recently to find out how well you were learning. Thank you for talking to us and sharing your views about your school. We enjoyed our two days and listened very carefully to what you said. This letter is to share our findings with you.

We judged your school to be a good school that is improving rapidly. Some aspects of it, such as the curriculum, are already outstanding. We saw that all the staff at Overleigh work really hard to make 'Children First' a reality. We saw that you care for each other well and those of you who come to Overleigh from another school, or even another country, soon feel at home. You know how to keep healthy and we noticed that many of you enjoy the fruit and salad bar at lunchtime. You showed us that you like to keep active at playtimes and you take advantage of the interesting extra activities. Mrs Ravey was particularly impressed with your singing in the choir (we were sorry we missed the cantabile group) and we all thought your art work was stunning.

In lessons, your work with your 'shoulder partner' is good. We agree with your teachers that this helps you to learn, particularly as you concentrate so well. Your behaviour is excellent and you are most polite to visitors. Your school council is professional, we can see that meetings are run effectively. We are also impressed with the work of the ECO group; the outside classroom and planters are lovely and your plans for the future are very exciting indeed.

Although your school is good, we agree with the plans your headteacher has to make it even better. Your headteacher is going to use all the information she has available to check that the school improvement plans are improving your learning. Your teachers are going to make sure that your work always has just the right level of challenge for you, whatever your ability. You can help your teachers, by always aiming high and trying your hardest.

With my very best wishes for the future.