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Martin Garratt
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Dear Mr Garratt

Short inspection of Vale School, Worthing

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2017 with James Munt, Ofsted Inspector, 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 (then a first and middle school) was judged to be good in March 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 are aspirational for all your pupils and constantly looking for ways to further develop the school. You reflect carefully on the school's work and strategically analyse results in order to decide the right priorities for improvement. You share this with staff and governors so that everyone understands the next steps for the school. You have created a strong staff who are proud to work at Vale School. Staff appreciate your willingness to embrace new ideas for the benefit of the pupils. Senior leaders support staff well to develop their teaching skills. Consequently there is a stable staff team.

The vast majority of parents say that their children are safe and happy at school, and would recommend the school to others. Behaviour seen during the inspection was exemplary. Pupils learn to work collaboratively in the Reception Year, and their respect and support for each other continue right through the school. Pupils develop into confident learners and good communicators by the time they leave the school.

Across the school there are high expectations of behaviour and standards. Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning, and this, underpinned by good classroom routines, helps learning flow smoothly. Teachers question pupils effectively to check their understanding, and activities usually provide the right level of challenge.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to develop teaching further by, for example, asking teachers to adapt activities better to pupils' needs and ensuring that lessons are sufficiently interesting. Working with teachers, you have effectively tackled these areas so that the majority of pupils make good progress.

Teachers use their information about pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills effectively to identify those in need of support or with gaps in their learning. Teaching assistants provide valuable help for groups and individuals, and there are useful prompts or equipment to aid pupils in class. Teachers ensure that pupils know where they have succeeded and the next steps needed to improve further. Pupils themselves say, 'Teachers make learning fun' and are consequently attentive and focused in lessons.

Pupils speak enthusiastically about their learning themes. They are gripped by titles such as 'Outbreak', which fire their imagination because teachers' introductions are creative and stimulating. Pupils speak with respect about the different religions they have studied. Pupils' achievements across the curriculum are supported by a carefully constructed programme of life skills, such as road safety or touch-typing. There are also opportunities to take on roles such as house captain or member of the school council, which help pupils understand their responsibilities. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education and to be future citizens.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Safety is a top priority at Vale School. The commendable induction process ensures that all staff and volunteers are very well briefed when they first join the school. All the right checks are made on adults and training in all aspects of safeguarding is kept fully up to date. Adults are fully aware how to report any concerns, and other agencies such as social services are swiftly notified when needed. Staff know families well, which helps them to identify any concerns at an early stage and provide good support.

Pupils say that they feel safe at school and that they are taught to keep themselves safe. For example, on the day of the inspection pupils were participating in 'internet safety day', learning about online safety. They are also confident that adults are there to help if needed. One pupil commented, 'Don't keep it inside, talk to a grown up,' reflecting the culture of trust and emotional security which the school provides for its pupils.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors focused on: safeguarding arrangements at the school; how well the area for improvement from the last inspection had been tackled; the effectiveness of support for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; the impact of teaching on pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics, especially in key stage 1; and the quality of the curriculum.

- Although one or two parents expressed concerns to me that their child with special educational needs had not been well provided for, there were more parents who thanked the school for its good work in this area. Your staff in the early years work effectively with pre-school settings to ensure that children with identified needs are well supported as soon as they start at Vale School. This good support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities continues as pupils move up through the school. Their progress, seen in their work, is generally in line with expectations. Where the school's summary information appears to indicate dips in progress in some year groups, this is often due to changes in the cohort. Senior leaders carefully analyse this information to identify trends in order to inform strategic planning.
- Teachers have a good awareness of the needs of disadvantaged pupils. They know the barriers to learning, both at home and in school, and plan effective support to overcome these. As a result, disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, usually make progress in line with other pupils in reading and mathematics. These pupils make slower progress in writing, which you have rightly identified as a whole-school area of focus.
- Your strategies to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, including work carried out by your learning mentors, are paying off. You have succeeded in halving the high level of persistent absence. Although figures are now better than the national average, you are by no means complacent, and intend to continue your drive to ensure that pupils attend regularly.
- There are weaknesses shown in the published information for Year 2 in 2016. However, this cohort, now in Year 3, is currently making good progress in reading and mathematics, and there is a similar picture across the school. Although progress is slower in writing, both in Year 3 and across the school, you have already started to address this. The new spelling initiative is helping pupils to improve this aspect of their work. Examples of writing on display and in pupils' books indicate that your recent focus on handwriting is also making a difference. It is too early to see the impact of these improvements in the school's achievement information.
- The curriculum, identified as effective at the time of your last inspection, remains a strength. You made good use of the extra space created when the school reduced in size, such as creating dedicated spaces for dance and art to enhance learning. The recently opened all-weather pitch is another welcome addition to your facilities. Pupils have many opportunities to enjoy sports and music, including learning the recorder in Year 3 and the cornet in Year 5. The specialist support for sport, art and music ensures that these subjects are taught to a high standard. The wide range of after-school clubs, as well as many sports, includes activities such as chess and cookery, to interest all pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue the school's focus on writing, in order to improve outcomes for all groups of pupils

- build on the good start made to raise attendance, so that it remains in line with, or better than, national figures.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your deputy headteacher (who is also the designated safeguarding leader), the school business manager, four governors, a group of pupils, a group of teachers and the school's special educational needs coordinator. The lead inspector also met with a representative from West Sussex local authority. Inspectors visited classes across the school to view teaching and learning as well as conducting four visits to lessons with the deputy headteacher. Inspectors also considered 49 responses to the staff questionnaire and 207 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. They also took into account 93 responses to the free text service, and a letter from a parent. Inspectors analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan, minutes of the governing body, and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.