

# Virginia Primary School

Virginia Road, Bethnal Green, London E2 7NQ

**Inspection dates** 16–17 March 2016

**Overall effectiveness** **Outstanding**

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   | Outstanding |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Outstanding |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare  | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils                          | Outstanding |
| Early years provision                        | Outstanding |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have created a culture of high aspirations. Everyone is focused on improving pupils' learning and doing things better. This ensures that pupils have very high aspirations of what they can achieve in their learning and life.
- Pupils love learning across all subjects in the primary curriculum. This enjoyment starts in the early years and continues through their school career. They are helped to unlock reading through their rapid development of reading skills.
- Pupils have an exceptional understanding of equalities. They are adamant that they challenge behaviour or views that undermine equal opportunities, for example homophobic language. Pupils know the impact that derogatory language can have on people's well-being.
- Teachers are highly skilled in developing pupils' learning. They ask deep and searching questions that extend pupils' thinking and understanding.
- Governors are highly challenging and focus on how well pupils achieve academically and socially. They are self-critical and are driving their own improvement as well as the school's.
- Regardless of their background, ethnicity, gender, or starting point, pupils make exceptionally strong progress in their learning. Teachers' strong subject knowledge is evident in their teaching across the curriculum. This helps to ensure that rapid progress is typical in all areas of pupils' learning
- Pupils' attendance at school is high. Leaders have successfully worked with parents to improve individual pupils' attendance. As a result, persistent absence has been eliminated over the past two and a half years. This demonstrates the highly positive attitude pupils have towards their learning and school.
- Pupils behave impeccably throughout the school. They show one another respect and demonstrate tolerance when things do not go to plan. Pupils, staff and parents feel part of a community with a shared vision and set of values. This is a golden thread in the school's work and success.
- Leaders work very effectively with health professionals to identify children who may benefit from accessing nursery sessions early. This work helps to ensure that the most-vulnerable children get off to a flying start when they formally begin nursery at 3 years old.

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Leaders and managers should evaluate the short- and long-term impact of curriculum enrichments more precisely, such as the school annual visit to St Catherine's College, Oxford.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher, ably supported by her deputy headteacher, has shown a relentless focus on raising the quality of the school's work for all pupils. Since the last inspection, significant improvements have been secured and maintained in all areas of the school. This can be seen in the school's outstanding work in teaching, assessment, behaviour and the early years.
- Senior leaders have been very effective at sharing responsibility with subject leaders across the school. Specific training and mentoring has supported new middle leaders in focusing on necessary improvements in their areas of responsibility. Senior leaders have ensured that leaders at all levels are focused on driving school improvement priorities and quickly solving any areas of potential decline.
- Senior leaders have placed a strong emphasis on developing the skills of teachers and teaching assistants across the school. For example, two teaching assistants have been given time and support to undertake their GCSE mathematics qualification. This illustrates the high expectations leaders have of staff's subject knowledge. Other staff have been able to engage in action research at master's level. For example, a teacher has led improvements in pupils' ability to reason and conducted research to examine the impact of this work on how pupils learn. Staff across the school engage in discussing pupils' learning and how it can be improved. Staff talk about how leaders have created a community of learning at all levels.
- Talents and skills within the wider support staff are recognised, nurtured and developed. For example, a higher-level teaching assistant has been supported to take on leadership of the primary sports premium. This additional funding from the government has been well focused on developing the ability of all teachers to deliver high-quality physical education. The sports leader has also ensured that the funding has widened participation, for example enabling the teaching of water polo, boccia and basketball. Pupils' participation in sports has increased as a result, and the school has been successful in local competitions. A well-developed understanding of the values of the Olympic and Paralympic games is evident when talking to pupils. The legacy of the London 2012 games is strong in continuing to raise the aspirations of individual pupils to strive for success in a range of sports.
- Leaders have placed equality at the heart of the school's teaching across the curriculum. Equality is not just an abstract word to pupils. They have an understanding of what it means and can explain this, practically, across a range of issues such as gender, homophobia and disabilities. The school has engaged with parents exceptionally well to ensure that they understand why homophobic language or bullying is unacceptable. Parents were able to explain to inspectors how this had changed their personal understanding and the impact this had on their own lives. 'I was concerned when they started talking about homophobia. The school explained this really clearly though and I now support saying "no" to homophobic behaviour.' Leaders have eradicated this kind of behaviour successfully over the last two years.
- The school's commitment to equality is demonstrated by the academic success that they ensure for pupils in their care. Leaders make highly effective use of funding for disadvantaged pupils. These pupils perform better than their peers across the school. Over time, this means that they catch up and, academically, overtake their peers. However, all pupils do much better than pupils of a similar age nationally. Support is focused strongly on the needs of individuals to ensure that they make progress in areas where they experience difficulty. Interventions are limited and reviewed regularly. This ensures that changes are made quickly when leaders identify that support is not having the planned impact.
- Pupils are proud of being English and British. They have been helped to develop a clear understanding of the institutions that uphold the British way of life, such as the Royal Family, the courts and parliament. They have met their member of parliament (MP) and Year 6 visit parliament annually. This helps to develop their understanding of democracy and that this represents 'people power'. 'We have free speech in this country and can disagree with the government. We get to send our choice of representative to parliament every few years'. The school is twinned with a school in Nottinghamshire. Together, they are helping pupils to understand the similarities and differences of living in different places in Britain.
- The local authority has recognised the school as a strength within the local education network. Local authority officers have a good understanding of this school and its many strengths. They have used this knowledge to signpost the early years as an excellent place for newly qualified teachers to see strong practice in a school setting.
- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has engaged in supporting and challenging a range of other schools. She works with local community groups and a local children's centre. These partnerships have helped to further strengthen the work of the school, particularly in the early years.

- Leaders and staff, including teaching assistants, have planned a systematic curriculum that develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding effectively. Trips are planned carefully to enhance learning across these areas and the school is particularly adept at developing an 'awe and wonder' of life by, for example, allowing pupils to appreciate how music 'speaks' to individuals and how art can inspire feelings of pleasure.
- Pupils experience a range of trips and visitors as part of their learning across subjects. Year 6 visit St Catherine's College, Oxford. This provides an early introduction to the world of higher education and life beyond London. Pupils from previous years have shown a greater aspiration to attend university after their visits. However, leaders agree that they could be more precise in evaluating the impact of enrichments such as this on the curriculum as a whole. They understand that currently they have little insight into the impact of this work or its impact on longer-term aspirations.
- **The governance of the school**
  - The governing body is highly effective in holding leaders to account. It is focused on driving the school forward continuously. Each member is clear about areas of responsibility and there is careful planning to replace skills that may be lost: governors are skilled to take over the role of chair or the responsibility of keeping a watchful eye on the safeguarding of pupils.
  - Governors are rightly proud of the school's progress in recent years and maintain a care to ensure that any early signs of decline are quickly addressed. Governors are visible in the school community and known by parents. Parents report feeling comfortable to discuss concerns or positive feedback, particularly with parent governors.
  - The governing body is careful to reflect on the impact of their work. They challenge leaders to account fully for the impact of initiatives which require the investment of time or money. This is illustrative of the governors' self-critical approach to ensure that the school continues to drive forward and improve the lives of the children at Virginia Primary.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and governors have ensured that all staff, volunteers and governors are aware of their statutory safeguarding responsibilities. Staff are rigorous in identifying concerns and working with relevant agencies to protect children from harm or neglect. The school staff are very aware of their responsibilities with regard to child sexual exploitation and preventing female genital mutilation (FGM). Leaders use their comprehensive understanding of the school's locality to identify and protect pupils from possible extremism and radicalisation. Leaders work effectively with other external agencies to protect pupils, including the police, social care and health services.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Expectations of what pupils can achieve are high across all subjects. This leads to significant improvements in handwriting, presentation and the content of work over time. Adults work well together to challenge the learning of all pupils constantly, regardless of their ability.
- Teachers ask highly effective and searching questions which challenge pupils to think deeply and explain their thinking. In mathematics, this develops pupils' skills in reasoning (where they can think about how, what and why they tackle calculations). In other subjects, they develop an ability to explain orally and back up their thinking: in science, pupils discussed why they selected particular resources to undertake an experiment.
- Reading is developed strongly. It is at the heart of all work in the school. Children are taught very effectively about letters and the sounds that they make, which is known as phonics, in the early years. They are encouraged to apply this skill throughout their learning. From these earliest school years and throughout the school, pupils develop an understanding that reading helps them learn. Pupils talk with pride about how reading helps them 'unlock' learning in other subjects.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge which is used skilfully to extend pupils' learning in oral and written feedback. Teachers break down more complex ideas regularly and help pupils to build on their existing understanding of concepts. They use their comprehensive understanding of the school's curriculum to plan meaningful learning contexts. For example, recently, Year 6 pupils considered how to obtain clean water using filtering. At the same time, they considered the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Children and that all children have the right to clean water. This led to a high-quality understanding of how science can benefit society and make life better for citizens around the world.
- The teaching of personal, social and health education is a strength of the school. Children, from the nursery upwards, learn the importance of mutual respect, managing feelings, becoming a good citizen

and staying healthy. This learning is pitched at the needs of each year group and is adapted effectively based on the identified needs of individuals or groups. For example, pupils are taught not to accept homophobic bullying and derogatory language. This learning emerged because of leaders' careful analysis of behaviour records. Pupils' intolerance of discriminatory behaviour helps to ensure that they are ready for life in modern London and Britain.

- Music teaching enables pupils to develop a love of singing and playing musical instruments. Pupils learn to play a range of instruments, including the violin, percussion and cello. Leaders have ensured that pupils develop their ability to read music and learn about the importance of pitch, rhythm and posture. A significant proportion of pupils continue learning musical instruments beyond attendance at this school. Pupils are helped to develop a deep understanding of different types of music and the important role that music plays in British society. For example, they can explain how West End musicals, popular music and classical music bring joy to different people. One pupil explained, 'Music helps you understand life. It is a language we can all speak if we learn it. Classical music can make you feel happy or sad, just like pop music. I love both.'

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are enormously proud of their school and their learning. They talk with zeal about their joint achievements, for example the timeline of human history. They can explain how they worked together to select the main events in history, developed artwork to represent each period of time and put it on display, together, in a school stairwell. The feeling of community runs throughout the school. Each pupil is a key part of building the picture of success at the school.
- Pupils' enthusiasm is shown by their very high attendance at school. They attend more frequently than their peers nationally and not one pupil is persistently absent from school. This highly significant achievement is not a 'blip'. No pupil has been persistently absent (absent for more than 10% of the school year) since 2013. They are enthusiastic in class and use feedback from staff to develop their learning further.
- Pupils have a deep sense of respect between themselves, to adults around school and their parents. They are helped to truly appreciate the benefits of equality and to uphold this value in their life. One pupil explained, 'Everybody is different. Everybody is equal. We do not treat anyone differently and accept everyone.'
- Leaders work effectively with other agencies to ensure that the risk of pupils being harmed is reduced as much as possible. They are tenacious and follow up their concerns until they know that pupils in their care are receiving the support required to keep them safe. Detailed records are kept of safeguarding concerns and leaders are self-critical and continuously learn from each experience. They have forged an excellent relationship with the local 'Prevent' team to ensure that potential cases of radicalisation and extremism are dealt with quickly.
- Pupils have a well-formed understanding of how to stay safe beyond school, including online. They know what to do when they feel vulnerable to risks and know how to prevent themselves from becoming vulnerable. As pupils progress through the school, they are helped to develop an increasingly sophisticated appreciation of the dangers of mobile technology and social media, including online videos.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The behaviour of pupils in their classrooms is consistently impeccable. During lessons, pupils focus their time on learning. No time is wasted on off-task behaviour. This is achieved with the exceptionally high expectations from staff and pupils' enthusiasm for learning.
- Staff, regardless of their role, take responsibility for praising good behaviour and challenging any slight digression from expectations. Pupils' conduct is excellent in the school building and in the playground. At lunchtime, staff provide well-supervised games such as tag rugby. However, pupils appreciate that not everyone wishes to play an energetic game. Pupils respect those who opt to read, talk quietly with friends or choreograph dance moves. The playground is set up very well to allow pupils to have appropriate spaces for their different interests.

## Outcomes for pupils are outstanding

- All pupils, including the most able, disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs or disability, make outstanding progress consistently from the early years and throughout the school.
- Children begin this journey of outstanding educational achievement from when they start in the school's Nursery or Reception classes. They enter the early years with skill levels below or well below those typical for their age. Over the past three years, the school has successfully improved the progress made by children. It is now rapid in all areas of their learning, especially in their speaking, listening, reading and writing of English.
- The school's own assessment information and scrutiny of pupils' books confirm that rapid progress continues throughout Key Stage 1. By the time pupils leave Key Stage 1, in Year 2, their attainment is above the national average. Similarly, rapid progress continues to be made throughout Key Stage 2. As a result, pupils' progress is well above their peers nationally and their attainment is high compared to the national average for reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, all pupils are well prepared academically for secondary school.
- Phonics is taught consistently and to a very high standard. Pupils make rapid progress in being able to understand and apply their skills in reading, writing and across other subjects. The proportion of pupils who attain the required standard in phonics at the end of Year 1 has been above the national average for three years. The very small number who do not attain this standard receive highly focused support and teaching to enable them to secure their reading skills as quickly as possible.
- Pupils develop an increasingly sophisticated and mature writing style as they progress through the school. They are confident in a range of writing by the time they finish Year 6. Pupils are rightly proud of the fiction and non-fiction writing they create. It is consistently above the expectations that would be expected for their age, particularly in Key Stage 2.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics is outstanding. They develop a deep appreciation for the purposes of mathematics and a self-confidence in the subject as one that can be tackled by them. As a result, pupils, across the school, make rapid progress in their ability to calculate and to reason mathematically. By the end of Year 6, pupils attain more highly than their peers nationally.
- The most-able pupils are given work that deepens their thinking across the curriculum. These pupils develop a depth and mastery rather than simply pushing on to new content. For example, in mathematics the most-able pupils consider more abstract mathematics such as algebra regularly. In science, they show a depth of understanding about evolution and inherited characteristics, or genes, from parents to children. This depth of teaching helps to ensure that the most-able pupils are thoroughly challenged while maintaining high rates of progress. The most-able pupils, like their peers across the school, fully achieve the attainment of which they are capable over time.
- The school has a high proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Leaders have ensured that teachers consider the needs of learners new to the English language and those who are now bilingual. Teachers teach vocabulary within subjects carefully to ensure that all children can discuss and access their learning in subjects across the curriculum. This exemplifies the school's deep commitment to equality of opportunity in learning. As a result, pupils, regardless of their ethnic background, make similarly excellent progress across the curriculum.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make excellent progress also, regardless of their starting points in learning. Skilled teaching supports and challenges them in the classroom and staff adapt work to meet their individual needs. Similarly, for disadvantaged pupils, any interventions are time-limited and aimed specifically at identified areas of need in individual's academic or social learning. Disadvantaged pupils make at least as good progress as their peers consistently. Overall, they outperform their peers in all areas of their learning, both in the school and nationally.

## Early years provision is outstanding

- Leaders in the early years have a clear understanding of the children in their care. This is due to the excellent outreach work that begins before children reach nursery. Some of the most disadvantaged children are engaged in play sessions prior to starting nursery at three years old which helps these pupils to accelerate their learning before they begin, formally, at the school.
- Children begin nursery and reception with an eagerness to participate in play sessions and learning. Accurate records are maintained by the school to show how children, from all groups, make rapid progress across all areas of the early years curriculum.

- The school engages with parents successfully. This begins a strong bond between parents and the school that lasts through to Year 6. Parents regularly attend workshops aimed at helping them support their child's learning. Equally, the vast majority of parents actively support the school by attending class assemblies and events. From this early stage in their children's education, a large majority attend parent-only trips, prior to the pupils' visit, so that parents can understand the school curriculum and how they can support their child's learning better as well as make friends in the school community. While this is not unique to the early years, it begins here and is a key reason why the school has a shared vision and understanding of what the school aims to achieve.
- All children make strong progress in their learning through the early years, regardless of whether they begin in the Nursery or Reception Year. Disadvantaged children and those who have special educational needs or disability make strong progress. All children are skilfully enabled to develop their social skills. They are taught to listen and speak with adults who guide them, appropriately, in a range of activities. Those children, who begin school unable to speak English, are supported very effectively to make exceptional progress in learning the English language alongside their peers in the class.
- Children have access to a high-quality environment that is stimulating and focused on their individual learning. Children benefit from a range of high-quality teaching and play-based activities. Some activities help children learn without them even realising it. For example, 'disco maths' engaged nursery children in basic number work but they learned about positional language such as, 'above, below, behind or under' at the same time.

## School details

|                                |               |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 100926        |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Tower Hamlets |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 10003749      |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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| <b>Type of school</b>                          | Primary  |
| <b>School category</b>                         | Maintained   |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                     | 3–11   |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                        | Mixed  |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>     | 225  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                   | The governing body   |
| <b>Chair</b>                                   | Malcolm Dawes  |
| <b>Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge</b> | Kate Gooding   |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                        | 020 7739 6195  |
| <b>Website</b>                                 | <a href="http://www.virginia.towerhamlets.sch.uk">www.virginia.towerhamlets.sch.uk</a>   |
| <b>Email address</b>                           | <a href="mailto:admin@viginia.towerhamlets.sch.uk">admin@viginia.towerhamlets.sch.uk</a> |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>             | 24–25 November 2010  |

## Information about this school

- Virginia Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school nationally. It has eight classes from Nursery to Year 6.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritage groups is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and looked after children) is well above the national average.
- The school meets the government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.



## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out initially under section 8 of the Education Act, 2015, as a short inspection of a school judged to be good at its most recent section 5 inspection. The inspection was converted to a full section 5 inspection when it became apparent that the school might have improved sufficiently to be judged outstanding.
- Inspectors observed learning and teaching across the school, in all classes. Many visits to classes were jointly done with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, senior leaders, subject leaders, a representative of the local authority, and two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of pupils' learning in workbooks, including their work in mathematics, writing and reading. Further work and monitoring was examined from a range of subjects, including art, computing, music, geography, history, science and personal, social, health and economics education.
- Inspectors went on a formal walk of the school building with two groups of pupils, one from Key Stage 1 and another from Key Stage 2. Pupils spoke to inspectors about typical behaviour, bullying, derogatory language, the school curriculum and the contribution made to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The lead inspector observed the head teacher and deputy headteacher checking the quality of learning and teaching across a range of classes.
- Inspectors heard pupils reading in class, observed behaviour in lessons, around school and at breaktimes. They considered the views of the 22 responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View. The 16 responses from the staff survey and the 32 responses from pupils were also considered.

## Inspection team

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Ofsted Inspector

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