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8 February 2019

Mr Richard November  
Headteacher  
Valence Primary School  
Bonham Road  
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Dear Mr November

### **Short inspection of Valence Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2019 with Diane Rochford and Shaheda Karim, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since taking on the role of headteacher in September 2017, you have made effective changes. You have developed a skilled senior leadership team that works collaboratively to promote clear strategic direction. Leaders work enthusiastically alongside you to ensure that the school continues to improve.

You and your team have focused sharply on strengthening pupils' achievement. Together, you have prioritised actions effectively and introduced important changes to maintain high standards of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, more work is needed to ensure that disadvantaged pupils are challenged enough in their learning.

Leaders provide staff with effective support. They guide and enable teachers to deliver improved outcomes for pupils. As a result, in the early years and key stage 1, pupils make good progress across the curriculum. However, further work is required to strengthen the outcomes of the most able pupils. In part, this is because staff sometimes do not use assessment information to set appropriately demanding tasks for these pupils.

Governors know the school well. They share and support your high aspirations for pupils. They have worked with you effectively to bring about continued and sustainable improvements. Together, you have invested in the development of a

rich and vibrant curriculum, which introduces pupils to new experiences linked to reading, writing and humanities. The school's approach to the teaching of reading provides pupils with well-targeted opportunities to explore and develop their critical thinking. Nevertheless, there is room in the wider curriculum and in the teaching of reading to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding of new concepts and vocabulary.

Parents and carers feel that the school supports their children well and responds to any concerns effectively. Pupils are polite and well mannered; they are confident and happy. They conduct themselves around the school extremely well.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are vigilant and ensure that pupils are kept safe and secure. Leaders and staff deal with safeguarding concerns in a timely and appropriate manner. Staff training is up to date and safeguarding records are kept in good order.

Leaders share information effectively with parents and appropriate external agencies to ensure that pupils receive extra help when they need it. Pupils say that they feel safe and know who to speak to if they have any worries. Parents agree that leaders and staff address concerns promptly. The governing body oversees all safeguarding procedures and checks that they are effective in promoting pupils' welfare.

### **Inspection findings**

- At our initial meeting, we agreed four lines of enquiry. First, we looked at the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Outcomes at the end of key stage 2 show that disadvantaged pupils are not making as much progress as other pupils nationally.
- Leaders and governors have prioritised the need to increase the proportion of disadvantaged pupils attaining the age-expected standard in mathematics, reading and writing by the end of Year 6. To achieve this aim, leaders have put in place effective programmes of additional support, including highly focused small-group teaching. For example, in Year 5, pupils were fully immersed in writing a diary entry based on 'Romeo and Juliet'. Their writing included well-chosen vocabulary to capture the readers' interest.
- Alongside this, leaders have also reviewed how teachers use assessment to plan and sequence learning to meet pupils' needs. They have invested in training to improve teachers' planning skills. Overall, this is making a positive difference to the quality of pupils' learning. However, sometimes, teachers do not plan activities that are demanding enough for disadvantaged pupils, particularly in Years 3 and 4. More work is needed to ensure that a greater proportion of disadvantaged pupils attain as highly as they could in these year groups.
- The second line of enquiry considered leaders' work to improve the progress of the most able pupils so that a greater proportion exceed the standards expected

for their age.

- Typically, the most able pupils tackle their tasks enthusiastically and persevere, even when the work is difficult. Nevertheless, sometimes, for instance in Year 1, teachers set work that does not demand enough of these pupils. When this is the case, pupils lose focus on their learning. In contrast, in Year 6, teaching routinely stretches pupils' thinking. As a result, an increased proportion of pupils are working at the higher standard than has been the case in the past.
- The third key line of enquiry focused on the effectiveness of the teaching of reading. This was because, over the last three years, pupils' progress in reading during key stage 2 has declined.
- Following disappointing outcomes in the 2018 Year 6 reading assessments, leaders have taken effective steps to strengthen pupils' progress. You and your team have invested in training for teachers as well as high-quality books so that pupils are better able to practise and deepen their reading skills. Pupils across Years 5 and 6 are confident readers. They use appropriate strategies to read and understand unfamiliar words and demanding texts. When planning tasks, teachers make sure that the most able pupils complete activities which make them think hard about what they read. For example, in a Year 6 reading session, pupils benefited from opportunities to discuss and explore the role of women during the Second World War.
- Leaders have also introduced a new approach to the teaching of phonics in early years and key stage 1. Staff have received appropriate training to improve their subject knowledge. Leaders have reorganised how reading sessions are planned and delivered to ensure that teaching is well matched to pupils' needs. As a result, the majority of pupils acquire the phonics skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. Pupils are able to explain what they are learning and the strategies they use to help them read. Some of the most able pupils have progressed to more challenging comprehension work.
- The final line of enquiry focused on the quality of the curriculum and whether it offers pupils a deep and broad educational experience. We visited lessons together and looked at a range of pupils' work.
- Leaders make sure that the curriculum provides exciting opportunities for pupils to study a range of subjects, including science, history and geography. You and your team have made sure that pupils have increased opportunities to acquire subject-specific knowledge and concepts. For example, Year 1 children were learning about astronauts and what life in space is like; they also designed rockets. However, sometimes teachers do not explore the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary to deepen pupils' understanding.
- Leaders are currently redesigning the curriculum to further broaden pupils' experiences and improve their acquisition of knowledge. For instance, in history, Year 3 pupils learn about Egypt and local arts. In geography, they study locations. Pupils spoke with confidence and enthusiasm about what they had learned. Teachers plan meaningful opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills when they study different subjects. Nevertheless, leaders' work to strengthen the curriculum is recent. It is too soon to assess the impact on

deepening pupils' understanding, particularly for the most able pupils.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in all year groups, teachers use assessment information effectively to set work that challenges the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged to attain to the best of their abilities
- the curriculum gives due attention to developing and deepening pupils' vocabulary.

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

Yours sincerely

Maureen Okoye  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors visited classrooms. Most visits were made jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also looked at examples of pupils' work. Inspectors heard pupils from Years 1, 2, 5 and 6 read and held a meeting with pupils from the school council. Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, the co-chair of governors and spoke to a school improvement consultant.

Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the school's development plan and self-evaluation, policies and records related to safeguarding, and information about pupils' behaviour and attendance. Inspectors considered a range of evidence related to governance.

The views of 31 parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, were considered. Inspectors also considered nine parents' views gathered at the school gate. The 65 staff responses to Ofsted's survey were reviewed.