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Mr Nigel Shipton-Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Shipton-Smith

Short inspection of Valley Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 2019, 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Leaders and governors ensure that the school provides a safe and nurturing place for pupils to learn and play together. Pupils know that they are well cared for, typically commenting that teachers are friendly, fair and willing to listen to any concerns. I spoke to a group of Year 5 and 6 pupils at lunchtime on the day of the inspection. They told me that teachers make sure that work is 'just right' – neither too easy nor too difficult – and will always give extra help if they need it.

Since the last inspection, you have improved the progress of the most able pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers use skilful questioning to make pupils think more deeply about their learning and make sure that work is challenging. Consequently, a higher-than-average proportion of pupils reached the higher standard in reading in the statutory tests at the end of Year 6 last year. Work sampled from pupils currently in Year 6 shows that the proportion of pupils working towards the higher standards in writing and mathematics is also increasing.

The teaching of mathematics is a real strength of the school and pupils make strong progress in this subject. Pupils swiftly develop fluency in mental calculations and apply their skills to solving an increasingly complex range of problems. They are keen to gain reward points for participating in school-wide multiplication tables challenges.

Leaders and governors were very disappointed in pupils' results in 2017, when just over a quarter of pupils reached the nationally expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6. You took immediate and effective action to prevent this from happening again. As a result, in the 2018 tests pupils' standards were in line with the national average in all three subjects. Evidence in pupils' work shows that you are continuing to build on this success and pupils are making good progress.

Your work to broaden pupils' experiences and promote their aspirations for the future is particularly successful. Leaders work in partnership with local industries and further education colleges to give pupils access to a range of interesting activities, including in science and engineering. For example, pupils recently attended a science show where they learned about forces and Newton's laws of motion.

You also give pupils the chance to learn to play musical instruments including violin, guitar and trumpet. The Valley choir reaches out to the wider community through singing in local festivals and entertaining elderly residents in nearby care homes. Pupils are proud to represent their school in sports competitions, for example gymnastics, football and athletics. All this supports pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Most parents speak positively about the school. I spoke with a number of parents in the playground at the beginning of my visit, some of whom were former pupils in the school. They told me that they are happy with the school and feel comfortable in speaking to you and your staff about any concerns.

Pupils' behaviour and positive attitudes to learning are a credit to the school. Lessons are very rarely disrupted by poor behaviour because your behaviour policy is consistently applied and pupils are clear on your expectations. Pupils show respect for one another and for adults, typically commenting that teachers have a good sense of humour and make work interesting. The atmosphere in the school is one of calm and purposeful learning.

Governors are supportive, challenging and increasingly involved in the school. For example, they recently introduced a termly 'governor day' when they come into school to gain first-hand experience of how well pupils are learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The systems in place to check that adults at the school are safe to work with children are effective. Staff receive appropriate safeguarding and child-protection training. They understand the procedures they must follow if they have concerns about a pupil, including concerns about possible radicalisation. Posters around the school are a constant reminder to staff that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and it is essential to pass on any concerns, however small, to the designated safeguarding leads.

Pupils feel happy and safe in the school. Older pupils explained to me that there is very little bullying in the school, including by racist or homophobic name-calling. Pupils understand how to stay safe on the internet. For example, they understand that they must never accept a friend request on social media from someone they do not know and to seek adult help immediately if they come across any inappropriate material.

Inspection findings

- Firstly, I wanted to find out about pupils' progress in writing and mathematics in key stage 1. Standards in these subjects are rising. Strong teaching in Years 1 and 2 is having a positive impact on progress. You explained to me how the trend of improvement in children's progress from their low starting points in the early years means that pupils are increasingly well prepared to enter key stage 1.
- Teachers in key stage 1 move pupils on more quickly to writing activities once they have mastered basic letters and sounds. This is helping pupils to develop their skills in writing from the earliest possible stage and progress is improving. Equally, focused, daily work on number skills, reinforced with practical activities, ensures that pupils are well placed to approach more complex problems in key stage 2.
- I also wanted to know if last year's success in rapidly improving pupils' progress across key stage 2 is sustained for pupils currently in the school. My observations of learning and sampling of pupils' work showed me that progress continues to improve in all four year groups. Teachers have consistently high expectations of the amount and quality of pupils' work in English and mathematics. They encourage pupils to develop confidence and independence as learners. As a result, pupils ask one another for help if they are stuck and work well together in pairs and groups, and not a moment of learning time is wasted. These good learning habits underpin pupils' increasingly strong progress.
- I was interested in finding out about the progress of the most able pupils, particularly in mathematics and writing, in key stage 2. Historically, the progress of these pupils in reading was better than in writing and mathematics. However, your investment in training for teachers and support staff is paying dividends in improved teaching. Teachers plan for difficult challenges so that pupils have to think deeply and apply their learning across a range of subjects. For example, pupils construct graphs and make accurate measurements in science lessons and write comparisons of different faiths in religious education (RE) lessons.
- I wanted to find out about how you are developing the curriculum to meet the needs of the pupils in your school. I observed how you ensure that they make good progress in subjects such as science because you give them so many opportunities for practical experiments.
- I noted that pupils' progress in history, geography and French is less strong than in other subjects. This is because teachers do not systematically review pupils' prior learning and use this to plan activities that deepen their knowledge and understanding of these subjects.

- Pupils of lower ability in key stage 2 sometimes have extra support sessions for English and mathematics during other subject lessons. They do not subsequently have a chance to catch up on the learning they miss. This limits their progress across the wider curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum develops to enable pupils to build systematically on their skills, knowledge and understanding across the full range of subjects, including in history, geography and French
- pupils who miss out on lessons across the wider curriculum to receive extra help for English and mathematics are supported in catching up on their learning in other subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Janette Corlett
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and four other leaders. I spoke with a group of pupils at lunchtime. The assistant headteacher accompanied me on visits to classes, where I observed learning and looked at work produced by pupils in key stages 1 and 2. I spoke with a representative of the local authority and two members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body.

I examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. I considered school improvement action plans and leaders' self-evaluation. I also checked on the contents of the school's website. I spoke with parents in the school playground and considered 21 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered two written responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility, 20 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 96 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.