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Timothy Coulson
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Dear Mr Coulson

Short inspection of Valley Road School

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 2017, 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

As headteacher you have galvanised the school staff and local community to share your ambition to achieve the very best for the pupils in the school. Working closely with other school leaders, you have effectively developed a leadership structure that focuses on teamwork and shared accountability. Leaders are effective in carrying out their roles and are held to account for their areas of responsibility. As a result, the school's capacity to maintain, develop and deliver improvements is effective. Leaders and governors' self-evaluation is reliable and accurate.

You make sure that pupils enjoy their learning in a caring and secure environment that has a strong focus on developing pupils' personal skills. Pupils are proud of their school and so work hard, are confident and appreciate the good learning opportunities provided.

At the previous inspection the inspector recognised the many strengths of the school. They also identified the need to improve teachers' use of assessment so that work set is of a suitable challenge for pupils of varying abilities and the most able pupils in particular. Your work in these areas over time is effective. Current assessment information, supported by the work seen in books, shows that the most able pupils are being set more challenging work in reading, writing and mathematics. The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, now

tackle a greater range of tasks and activities that develop their thinking and question their understanding. As a consequence, more of these pupils are making strong progress and achieving higher standards in their learning.

In September 2016, assessment procedures were reviewed and updated, reflecting the higher expectations of the new curriculum. Assessments identified some gaps in pupils' knowledge. Teachers now provide tasks and activities that help pupils of all ability levels to 'fill in' these gaps to improve pupils' understanding so that they can make better progress. Current assessment information shows that the proportions of pupils achieving well is increasing in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders recognise the importance of maintaining this focus so that progress in these subjects is sustained over time.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong and effective culture of safeguarding in the school shared by you, the governors and the wider school community. Working together, you have made it a priority to create a safe and secure environment for pupils to learn and play. The school has well-developed procedures to protect pupils. For example, regular review and effective monitoring enable governors to hold leaders to account effectively. Record-keeping is detailed and all actions are followed up meticulously. Precise and detailed procedures ensure that school staff are properly vetted before they work at the school.

All school staff receive timely and good-quality training to ensure that they are confident applying the school's policies and guidance in relation to child protection issues. Parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, without exception agree that their children are well cared for and feel safe in school. Pupils say that they learn how to stay safe in lessons and that they feel safe because 'there is always someone for you to talk to'.

Inspection findings

- The school is rightly focusing on improving pupils' achievement in writing. In 2016, the proportions of pupils with middle starting points reaching the expected standard for their age and of those working in greater depth by the end of key stage 2 was low. A reorganised writing curriculum now meets the higher expectations that are required. Teachers focus on improving the range of writing that pupils have to experience. Pupils learn to edit their work to make sure that it is correctly punctuated and grammatically correct. The most able pupils are challenged to use more complex sentences to relate emotions and feeling in stories and make explanations in subjects such as science clearer. Current assessment information shows that this is having a positive effect on pupils' writing. The proportion of pupils who achieve well is steadily improving. The school recognises that the focus on writing must be continued to ensure sustained progress over time and increasingly high levels achievement.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. The phonics programme has been reorganised to support pupils better. Good-quality staff training and higher

expectations mean that pupils are now making better progress. A high proportion are on track to reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 2.

- Disadvantaged pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils are achieving well. Careful monitoring of their progress shows that the vast majority are on track to make the same progress in reading, writing and mathematics as other pupils nationally by the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Extra support to help these pupils learn, both in lessons and during individual sessions, is effective in building resilience, making these pupils good learners.
- Pupils make good progress and achieve well in the early years. With the support of the local authority and the drive and ambition of the leader of early years, better learning activities and higher expectations are leading to improved outcomes. The proportion of children who are on track to achieve a good level of development at the end of Reception is higher than that achieved nationally in 2016.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- changes in the approach to writing that the school has adopted are fully embedded, so that pupils make consistently strong progress in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

William James
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I had a particular focus on leaders' evaluations of the effectiveness of the school, how well the area for improvement from the last inspection had been tackled, and safeguarding arrangements at the school. In addition I focused on the areas of writing, phonics, the progress of disadvantaged pupils and how well children are doing in early years.

I visited classes in all key stage 1 and 2 and early years, accompanied by the headteacher. I looked at a range of work in pupils' books. I examined a wide range of school documents, including those that relate to safeguarding, leaders' self-assessment information and development planning as well as governors' minutes and assessment information. I talked to pupils to gather their views during lessons, on the playground and in the lunch hall. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, governors and the leader of early years. I had a meeting with a

representative of the local authority by telephone. I took into account the views of 110 parents who responded to Parent View and considered the 21 staff questionnaires.