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Mrs Debra de Muschamp
Principal
Valley Road Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs de Muschamp

Short inspection of Valley Road Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2018, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained and improved the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Your staff, parents and pupils all recognise the rapid improvements the school has made since the last inspection. Under your strong and dynamic leadership, standards have risen markedly. In recent years pupils have made significantly more progress than other pupils nationally and, as a result, leave the school with standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics that are well above the national average. Pupils are extremely well prepared for the next phase of their education and leave with the skills and positive attitudes to be successful at secondary school.

Throughout the inspection, it was clear you and your staff share a determination to address the barriers caused by disadvantage. Over 60% of your pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, including a sizable group of pupils who are looked after by the local authority. Many pupils speak English as an additional language and a high proportion of pupils have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Despite these challenges, pupils thrive in school and apply themselves diligently across the day. The high expectations you engender in your staff ensure that

everyone is ambitious and aspirational. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have been particularly strong over recent years, especially in writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils make excellent progress from the moment they enter the school. By the end of key stage 1, they attain standards above those seen nationally. They also make rapid progress across key stage 2 to reach standards well above those attained by other pupils nationally. You and your staff are not complacent. Your plans for improvement show a determination to ensure that outcomes in reading are further improved to match those seen in other subjects.

Your pupils make rapid progress because your teachers and teaching assistants have consistently high expectations and excellent subject knowledge. They ensure basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics are developed quickly and securely. In the early years, adults place a strong emphasis on teaching the sounds letters make and forming letters and numbers correctly. Children with limited speech and language receive frequent additional specialist help. A focus on handwriting last year has improved standards across the school. By the end of key stage 2 standards of handwriting and presentation are extremely high. Pupils take enormous pride in their work. Last year, nearly half of pupils attained the higher standard in the national curriculum spelling, punctuation and grammar test, reflecting pupils' strong grasp of written English.

The school has a broad, balanced and rich curriculum that pupils describe as 'interesting' and 'fascinating'. Pupil premium funding is used to support the frequent trips out in the school's mini-buses to places of local interest. These visits are used well to engage and capture pupils' interest and form the basis for science investigations and art projects. The curriculum also covers a broad range of topics that celebrate cultural diversity and effectively promote British values. There are many opportunities within topics for pupils to apply their English and mathematics skills. You provide a strong programme of sporting activities in physical education lessons and through after-school activities. Careful thought is going into promoting healthy lifestyles and tackling child obesity. There is excellent provision in place for pupils and families who are more vulnerable. As a result, potential barriers are quickly addressed, allowing pupils to focus on learning.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Around 100 pupils a day attend the free breakfast club, where they self-manage their behaviour and are trusted to take their coats and bags to classrooms. Across the day the school is calm and orderly. Pupils are polite and courteous towards one another. During the inspection I saw older pupils reading to younger ones at social times. In lessons, pupils work hard and complete tasks, taking considerable pride in their work.

Safeguarding is effective.

Checks on adults who work in or visit the school are thorough and carefully recorded. Leaders ensure detailed records are maintained about pupils' welfare and the actions taken to protect children. Information is shared well and, as a result, teachers and other staff keep a watchful eye on pupils, especially those who are more vulnerable. Family support workers and the school counsellor provide strong

and effective support for pupils and families who need extra help.

Safeguarding leaders ensure that safeguarding and child protection policies are well understood and that all members of staff receive up-to-date training. The leadership team has ensured all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Staff and pupils accept that some bullying does happen, although most pupils trust adults to sort it out if it is reported to them. Incidents of bullying are carefully recorded and prompt action is taken to resolve them. The school actively promotes friendship and includes discussion about anti-bullying strategies in the personal, social, health and economic curriculum. The school provides 'worry boxes' in most classrooms for pupils to report any concerns they have.

Inspection findings

- In recent years the strengths in leadership and management, evident when the school was last inspected, have realised consistently impressive outcomes. In particular, your leadership, as principal of the school, has raised expectations and challenged everyone, including the pupils, to give of their best. These qualities, recognised by the local authority, have been used to successfully influence practice in other schools. Last year's Year 6 pupils, whose attainment was below the national average at key stage 1, left the school with standards well above the national average. The progress of pupils currently in the school is similarly impressive. Any differences between the attainment of different groups are carefully monitored through leaders' rigorous analysis of assessment information. Any pupil at risk of falling behind is quickly identified and given extra help. Current tracking data indicates that over three quarters of pupils in Year 6 are making the progress necessary to attain the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in national curriculum tests this year.
- The quality of governance, identified as an area for improvement in the last inspection, has also improved. Governors have a well-developed monitoring cycle and make frequent visits across the year to check whether actions set out in the school development plan are making a difference. Governors are actively involved in the performance management of staff and are well informed about the use and effect of additional funding. The governors have taken the decision to convert the school to an academy in April and will form a new multi-academy trust.
- The quality of teaching has improved and is now consistently strong across the school. Well-designed training and professional development opportunities have sharpened up teachers' practice. In English, for example, regular handwriting practice, 'warm up the words' sessions and thought-provoking tasks ensure that pupils develop a strong understanding of spelling, punctuation and grammar. In mathematics, teachers and teaching assistants use a wide variety of well-designed learning tools to ensure that pupils develop confidence and fluency in calculation. Subject leaders show no complacency, however, and their astute checks on pupils' books, coupled with their analysis of assessment information, ensure that their plans for improvement are sharply focused on the right areas. Further work is underway to enhance the teaching of reading and, in

mathematics, to further develop the teaching of reasoning.

- Children typically enter the Nursery and Reception with skills below those expected for their age. Provision for two-year-olds makes a positive difference and accelerates children's progress. Many children catch up and enter the Nursery class with skills in line with expectations. By the end of the Reception Year the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is close to the national average. Pupils make a smooth transition into key stage 1, as classrooms and the curriculum are carefully designed to gradually introduce more formal learning. Progress in key stage 1 in all subjects is rapid. Reading is promoted successfully and the school has a welcoming and well-stocked library. Outcomes in the Year 1 national phonics screening check have risen year on year as the quality of teaching has improved. Last year, outcomes in phonics were 10% above the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- standards in reading at the end of key stage 2 are improved to match those seen in writing and mathematics, especially for disadvantaged pupils
- thorough checks are made to ensure the refinements to the teaching of reasoning in mathematics are fully embedded.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of the senior leadership team, the data manager and five governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I also met with a group of pupils and a group of parents to gather their views. Together, we visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the impact of your work to develop the quality of teaching. During lesson visits, I checked some pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I looked in detail at some pupils' work across the full breadth of the curriculum with your subject leaders for English and mathematics, in order to evaluate the progress pupils had made over time. I evaluated the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View). I also considered the 18 responses to the staff survey. I scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's self-

evaluation and improvement planning, policies, assessment records and other information available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the school. In addition, I looked at the effectiveness of teaching and the quality of early years provision. I also looked at the quality of leadership and management, including the work of governors, and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.