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Dear Ms Bowe

Short inspection of Villa Real School

Following my visit to the school on 20 November 2018 with Zoe Westley, Ofsted Inspector, 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 September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained 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 specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since taking up post in 2016, you have worked with energy and determination to steer a clear course to consolidate the previous inspection judgement. Doing so very effectively, you have set in train a clear direction of travel towards excellence.

Based on your initial assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, you engaged the assistance of the local authority to conduct a number of supported reviews. These included reviews of teaching and learning, health and safety and finance. In addition, you engaged an external provider to review the effectiveness of the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils. These provided you with solid knowledge of what needed to be done, and you have systematically set about implementing changes for the better.

You put pupils and their families firmly at the centre of the school's work. As a consequence of your unerring focus on pupils' well-being and achievement, pupils thrive. Parents feel involved in the partnership between school and home. They feel they can raise any issues they have with you, and that their views will be taken into account. Parents are full of praise for the determination of your staff to do their

very best for the pupils in their care. They talk about how well their children are developing and achieving.

Staff are committed and motivated by your example. Your work to develop their skills to meet your pupils' needs has enabled them to use and develop their very good knowledge of pupils in their classes. Teachers plan lessons that engage pupils very well. As a result, staff feel valued and know they make a difference to the lives of pupils and their families. Your staff appreciate the support and challenge you provide. You build professional confidence in your staff. They, in turn, work with pupils with assurance and great care.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They enjoy their time with their peers and with staff. The positive relationships you encourage support pupils very well, both in their personal development and their learning. As a consequence, pupils flourish in the well-ordered learning environment you have created.

You have brought a keen focus to ensuring that the curriculum is suitable to meet pupils' needs. You ensure that personalised planning helps pupils achieve their learning targets from their education, health and care plans. You have moved away from the earlier distinctions between academic learning, personal development and therapeutic support for pupils. By integrating these, pupils are well-supported in making at least good progress across the full range of their school experiences. Pupils grow in self-confidence and especially their ability to communicate through a wide range of methods. This contributes very well to the progress they make. As a result, pupils are proud of their achievements, and are keen to do well.

Alongside the development work on the curriculum, you have introduced changes in the school's assessment system, so that leaders, staff and governors have an accurate picture of how well pupils make progress. Parents benefit from this sharper information when they meet staff at parents' evenings and at annual reviews. You have carefully considered with your leadership team how well the system achieves your aim of producing a fully rounded view of pupils' progress and development. You are again looking at the range of further information that you gather and are seeking to incorporate this to refine further your overall assessment procedures. You see this as an important step in supporting staff development to make even better use of information about pupils to inform their planning and work in classrooms.

The sharper use of progress and personal development information is used very well by staff teams in planning learning experiences. They personalise challenge for pupils and use their classroom skills effectively to adjust challenge and help pupils who struggle. As a result, the proportion of pupils who make at least good progress is high. You help staff and families understand that for some pupils with particular conditions positive achievement is represented by a slowing of regression.

You have brought greater clarity to the roles of leaders in your team. Key stage leaders play an increasingly effective role in shaping the curriculum and support for pupils. This has contributed to the much stronger progress pupils have made since

the re-structure. Close collaboration between leaders ensures that transition is very well managed, so that each key stage builds on the knowledge and skills previously acquired. As a consequence, pupils are well prepared for the next steps in education and training. Some leave the school at an appropriate stage to attend specialist colleges, while others continue to attend school in the sixth form.

Governors are also committed to make the school a place of excellence. They work hard to ensure that they know the school very well. Regular visits to the school are recorded and passed for information and consideration to the whole governing body. Their detailed knowledge of pupils' progress enables them to challenge leaders to maintain the high standards achieved.

Safeguarding is effective.

With your leaders and staff, you ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Governors ensure that all the required checks on staff are carried out and recorded carefully on a single central register, to ensure that only suitable adults work with pupils.

Safeguarding leaders and staff receive regular training and update information about risks that pupils may face. They make sure all staff know the latest guidance of the Secretary of State. Staff are very aware of the vulnerabilities of their pupils. They use their very good knowledge of pupils in their care to keep alert for any signs of distress, or abuse and neglect. Staff use the school's systems to record any concerns they have, so that safeguarding leaders can arrange for early help when it is needed. Leaders are correctly insistent in raising concerns to secure help.

As part of your work to re-design the curriculum, you have made sure that there is a firm focus on helping pupils understand what they can do to keep safe. For example, in appropriate ways, pupils know how to keep safe when they use the internet. They understand that their personal details should not be shared. They feel safe in school, and trust staff to help them if they have a worry or a concern.

Inspection findings

- We considered with you and your leaders how well teaching, learning and assessment enable pupils to make at least good progress. The work seen in pupils' books and files across key stages and including the sixth form and early years demonstrated that effective teaching has led to increasingly strong progress over time. This confirms school records of pupils' progress, showing that the proportion of pupils making at least good progress has continually increased and has more than doubled over the last four years.
- Careful planning for pupils' needs and well-delivered skilful lessons support pupils' learning very well. In a key stage 4 and sixth form group, highly effective questioning cemented pupils' understanding of money and value, for example. In another group, pupils developed their physical responses to instructions, demonstrating how they could move and control their movements.
- Staff teams work very effectively together, so that all pupils are supported and

challenged appropriately. In a welcome activity at the start of the day, staff made sure that all pupils in a class group settled and engaged quickly. Staff capitalised on the well-established routines for learning by challenging pupils' understanding of day, date and time and pupils' understanding of the future.

- Pupils' clear commitment to their learning was exemplified in their workbooks and photographic records of their learning. Strong examples of extended writing confirmed that the most able pupils are given opportunities and challenged to bring their learning and thinking together in summative pieces of writing. For example, some pupils wrote at length about the evidence of human activity on local landscapes.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and interactions with each other and staff. They are proud of their learning and keen to share their enthusiasm and achievements with others, including visitors to the school.
- Pupils are open and curious and show a real sense of caring for each other and those around them. They were able to give good examples by talking about what they would do if someone bumped themselves or grazed a knee.
- Pupils enjoy the wide range of activities the school offers beyond the taught curriculum. Some pupils take on responsibilities at clubs and activities as part of their personal development programme. Pupils enjoy holiday clubs, for example, but recognise that these have been temporarily curtailed due to works at the school site.
- Pupils manage themselves very well, and respond positively to staff at moments when they need additional support. They attend very well overall, taking into account the medical needs of some pupils. However, a small number of other pupils do not yet attend often enough, despite the best efforts of the school so far.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff are supported in gaining an holistic picture of achievement, including the use of the wider information the school already gathers
- every effort is continued to improve further the attendance of a small number of pupils who do not attend regularly enough.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Campbell
Ofsted Inspector
Information about the inspection

During the inspection, my colleague and I met with you and other senior and middle leaders. We also talked with some pupils informally and in a group. We talked with a number of parents bringing their children to school in the morning. We also considered the views of parents expressed in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We held meetings with the governing body and two representatives of the local authority. We gathered evidence by visiting lessons in each year group and you and your deputy headteacher accompanied us for some of these. We also considered the work in pupils' books. We took into account staff responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. A wide range of documents was evaluated, including those relating to the school's safeguarding arrangements and the school's self-evaluation and plans for future development. We considered the school's records of pupils' progress and information about their attendance.