

Inspection of a good school: Valley Road School

Valley Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire RG9 1RR

Inspection dates:

15 and 16 March 2022

Outcome

Valley Road School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Family is what springs to mind when observing how adults and pupils are together. Caring relationships lie at the heart of Valley Road. Leaders make sure that pupils' individual personalities are brought to the fore. Pupils are eloquent and zestful. They eagerly welcome visitors and can talk at length about how they enjoy learning.

Outside, pupils play imaginatively and happily. Leaders deliberately do not overload them with too many things on offer. Instead, they teach pupils how to socialise, play team games and admire the natural world of the school's location. Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. There is a strong ethos through which every child knows they must behave. If they struggle, the other pupils act as role models. Leaders make sure that pupils are safe. Bullying, for instance, does not happen.

Pupils live in a town rich in culture. Leaders exploit opportunities to immerse them in extraordinary experiences. For example, pupils engage in the famous youth and literacy festivals. Pupils are keen sportspeople, with a strong competitive spirit. The school's own house events ignite everyone's interests. Furthermore, every child leaves the school able to swim. Although pupils generally achieve highly across the curriculum, teachers could expect even more.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Productive discussions between leaders and staff have led to a new and improved curriculum. Together they have mapped out when and why ambitious content is taught. Pupils' knowledge journey is clearly set out from Reception to Year 6. Staff work in small teams to lead all subjects. This enables shared expertise and wider professional development. Additionally, staff have worked with the main secondary feeder school to check what pupils must master before moving on.

The core subjects are of high quality. Here, leaders are crystal clear about what teachers need to do. They have trained all staff to deliver the curriculum extremely well. In

mathematics, teachers' subject knowledge is excellent. They explain concepts simply, which helps pupils to grasp some trickier ones. For example, in early years, children show aptitude for spending money up to 10 pence. In Year 2, pupils work well with reading time on an analogue clock. Furthermore, in Year 4, pupils are knowledgeable about multiplying and dividing decimals by 10. Staff use practical apparatus skilfully to deepen pupils' understanding. They revisit regularly to check what pupils remember. This helps teachers swiftly pick up on any misconceptions.

In teaching pupils to read, staff are following a new phonics programme. They have received the right training from the programme's makers. Not only that, but staff also revisit and review the expert learning modules. This is embedding greater consistency and flair across classes. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, most pupils are firmly on track. Those who need extra help are prioritised daily. Leaders ensure that staff follow the programme's plans for the 'keep-up' sessions. Pupils have access to reading books that match the sounds they know.

Older pupils read avidly. They relish the school's library, where there is no limit on the number of books they can borrow. An impressive and diverse range is on offer. Pupils even read adapted versions of Shakespeare's key plays. What is so heartwarming is that pupils donate books to the library. They are keen to spread the joy of reading to others.

In some other subjects, teachers can be swayed by creative activities because they want to capture pupils' interests. This can result in pupils undertaking tasks that are not challenging enough. These occasional choices are counterproductive and sell pupils short in gaining more knowledge. Consequently, pupils' work sometimes does not showcase their great potential.

Aspirations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are the same as for any other child. Leaders do not use a 'label' as a reason for lowering ambition. They ensure that assessments carried out are robust when identifying possible learning barriers. In lessons, adults use consistent strategies and approaches to enable pupils with SEND to learn the curriculum well.

The youngest children in the school sit sensibly when it is carpet time. They focus attentively. It is impressive how staff have negated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic here. They have dedicated extra time to teaching children how to socialise and follow routines. Beyond pupils' excellent behaviour in lessons, they are most accepting of others. They celebrate differences. They are mature in their outlook on life.

Governors are deeply committed to this school. They bring a wealth of experience from their professional roles. With some new members coming on board, they know that rigorous training is key to doing the role well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders do what they can to help families. They look beneath the surface of the community and do not presume anything. Staff are trained regularly about a range of safeguarding issues. They know to always consider that something 'could happen here'. The school employs a trained counsellor to support children's mental health. Staff know that if they spot anything worrying, then the headteacher will act immediately. Pupils learn about water safety, given the area's riverside location. The police and fire service visit too. Some recruitment checks for staff were not correctly recorded. Leaders rectified this during the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some tasks that teachers set for pupils are not well designed to secure knowledge. These are neither ambitious nor demanding enough. This hinders pupils' work across the curriculum being of a consistently high quality. Leaders need to support teachers' pedagogical content knowledge to fully meet the aims of the school's curriculum.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	123041
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10207105
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	190
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Dan Herbert
Headteacher	Timothy Coulson
Website	www.valley-road.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with the headteacher, staff and pupils. He also met with the chair and vice-chair of governors. He held a telephone conversation with a school improvement officer from the local authority.
- The inspector carried out deep dives into these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. To do this, he discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited lessons, had discussions with staff, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at pupils' work.
- Some younger pupils were observed reading to a familiar adult by the inspector.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector spoke with staff and pupils. He met with the designated safeguarding lead to examine records and actions. This

included sampling a range of safeguarding documentation. He reviewed checks on the safer recruitment of staff and training records.

- The inspector met with pupils from different year groups to talk about their learning and experiences at school.
- The views of staff, parents and carers and pupils were gathered through discussions and Ofsted's online surveys.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school improvement plan, leaders' self-evaluation, school policies, curriculum documents, published information about pupils' performance and minutes of governing body meetings.

Inspection team

James Broadbridge, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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