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Ms Sarah McLay
Headteacher
Vale School
Trulock Road
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Dear Ms McLay

Short inspection of Vale School

Following my visit to the school on 23 September 2015 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Supported by your senior leadership team, you have continued to develop the cohesion of this school across the four sites over which it operates. Despite each part of the school being co-located with a mainstream school and working closely with these partners, Vale School maintains its own identity. Consistent practices and processes are in place across the whole school that support this work.

Members of staff at all levels develop strong relationships with the pupils in their care. The care, guidance and support provided have continued to be of the highest quality. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure in school. They enjoy school and are happy to be there.

Leaders have worked hard to address the areas for development identified at the time of the last inspection. They have reviewed and refined their procedures for the regular assessment of pupils' progress and use a wide range of evidence to support their findings. They share their work with others both inside and outside the school to check that their assessments are accurate. They have devised consistent methods for recording very small steps of progress that pupils make. As a result, leaders and teachers can now check easily on the amount of progress pupils are making and compare this, through an online tool, with others who have similar starting points. This information is now informing teachers' planning and consequently the vast

majority of pupils are making good progress. Some most-able pupils within the school, however, make less progress than other groups.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have ensured that the safeguarding of pupils is at the heart of their work. They recognise that the pupils on roll within this school are particularly susceptible to abuse and exploitation as a result of their disabilities and special educational needs. Therefore, the maintenance of robust, rigorous systems to protect those within their care is given the highest priority.

Fortnightly multidisciplinary meetings are held to discuss any concerns around child protection or safeguarding. These meetings are attended by school leaders, social care and health professionals. In this way, all those working with the pupils are brought together to discuss issues and plan an effective way forward. These meetings also allow discussion about emerging issues, which can then be acted upon swiftly, before the situation escalates. This joined-up approach is a strength of the school's work.

Parents and pupils are secure in their knowledge that the school is a safe place, and that there are people who will help if support is needed. Staff are well trained, and leaders ensure that their training is updated on a very regular basis. As a result, they know what signs to watch for and report any concerns to the designated leaders promptly.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and accurate.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers are determined to ensure that each individual pupil achieves the best he or she can. They work with a wide range of partners to ensure each pupil's needs are addressed through a holistic and consistent approach.
- Governors know the school well. They attend training, are well informed about the progress pupils make and make regular visits to check on the school's work for themselves. Governors ask increasingly challenging questions of leaders in order to hold them to account. The new Chair of the Governing Body, appointed in September 2015, has worked with you to secure a clear vision for the further improvement of governance and oversight of the school.
- Teachers plan lessons that engage and motivate pupils. They ensure that activities are pitched at the right level so that most pupils make at least good progress. However, most-able pupils make less progress than others in the school, and sometimes the most-able pupils within a group or class are not challenged to extend their learning as far as they could.
- Leaders have a clear plan for further improvement of the school. This three-year plan identifies priorities, actions to be undertaken and key personnel for

each area. However, governors do not receive sufficient information about the timescales involved to check that the school is on track to achieve its goals.

- The school uses a range of approaches to improve the communication skills of pupils. They have introduced some new strategies since the previous inspection, which have had a significant impact on the ability of some pupils to communicate their needs and make choices. These strategies have also supported the development of self-confidence as pupils discover their own voice. This practice is still embedding, however, and its impact is not consistent throughout the school.
- School leaders maintain very close links with therapy staff, employed by the health authority, who work within the school. As a result, support staff are well trained in implementing programmes devised by therapists, and demonstrate confidence in doing so.
- The school works closely with the four mainstream schools where they are co-located. Pupils are included in mainstream classrooms and activities whenever possible in a meaningful way that promotes their independence and extends their learning. Inclusion opportunities are tailored for individual pupils to ensure they achieve well. Secondary pupils at Northumberland Park School may join their mainstream peers at break times; others are fully included in the mainstream curriculum and work towards some GCSEs. Primary-aged pupils located at Belmont Junior School or Belmont Infant School are included in mainstream classrooms as much as possible, receiving support and additional lessons from Vale School staff as appropriate. Those with more complex needs, based at the same site as Lancasterian Primary School, enjoy the sharing of special events, break times and assemblies with their mainstream peers. Where appropriate, they are included in mainstream classroom activities.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They are pleased to see their familiar staff members when they arrive in school. They are actively involved in lessons, and make good progress in terms of their attention to task and collaboration with others.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- their robust assessment systems further inform teaching so that all groups of pupils make accelerated progress, especially the most able and the most able within each group.

Yours sincerely

Gaynor Roberts

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, visits were made to all four sites on which the school operates. Inspectors held meetings with leaders, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. They also spoke informally with staff and pupils. Inspectors undertook observations in lessons. They also looked at records, reports and work relating to a selection of pupils, looking at a range of evidence to confirm the school's assessment of pupils' progress. A number of key documents were scrutinised including the school's plans for development, arrangements for safeguarding and analysis of information about pupils' progress.