

Inspection of a good school: Vallis First School

Milk Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 3DB

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 September 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at Vallis First School. They benefit from warm and trusting relationships with staff. Many parents describe the school as 'nurturing'. Pupils know the school rules of 'Ready, safe, care' well. Pupils behave sensibly, and they are kind to each other. For example, pupils share compliments about one another using their 'gratitude jars'.

The school aspires for pupils to leave Vallis First School well prepared for their next stage of education. Across the school, pupils study a range of subjects and enjoy their learning. However, work on the curriculum is in the early stages. Consequently, there are gaps in pupils' learning. The school does not yet have an accurate understanding of the impact of the curriculum in some areas.

The school chooses trips well to enrich the curriculum. For example, pupils visit Avebury Stone Circle, linked to a history unit. Pupils value the clubs on offer, such as football and cheerleading. The school hosts events to involve families, such as a 'Make Do and Mend' activity to enhance pupils' learning in design and technology. Pupils and their families learn sewing skills together. Pupils appreciate leadership opportunities to take on responsibilities, such as being eco-councillors and library monitors.

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

The school endeavours to spark a love of reading in everyone. The library is a welcoming space where members of the school community come together to share books. The school invites local authors and illustrators to share their talents. It has prioritised the teaching of early reading. Children learn phonics as soon as they start school. The books they read match the sounds they have been taught. Staff are trained to teach the

programme well. The school assesses pupils and addresses any gaps in knowledge quickly so that pupils keep up. Consequently, although published outcomes for phonics in 2022 were not strong, pupils now learn to read well.

The school has faced many challenges in recent years, including staffing and the COVID-19 pandemic. These have stifled curriculum development. Leaders and governors now have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors have taken steps to develop their skills to support the school to make improvements. The school has sought external advice and has used this to improve the content of the curriculum. However, this is still a work in progress, particularly in the key stage 2 reading curriculum and in some foundation subjects. In these subjects, the precise knowledge and sequencing of the curriculum have not been identified, from the early years. Because of this, pupils do not learn as well as they could in these subjects.

In mathematics, however, the curriculum is well planned and sequenced from the early years. Activities enhance children's mathematical understanding. For example, children enjoyed a 'matching socks' trail, while adults helped them to deepen their knowledge about pairs. Pupils further up the school can recall what they have learned well. This is because of the way leaders have thoughtfully sequenced the curriculum.

The school regularly monitors how well the curriculum is delivered in many subjects. Because of this, the school has an accurate understanding of how well pupils are learning. However, in some subjects, leaders newer to their roles have not had the opportunity to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum. This means the school does not yet have an accurate understanding of how well pupils are learning the curriculum in these subjects.

The school identifies pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities accurately. These pupils are given support to be able to access the curriculum well.

The school has created a positive environment for pupils. Children get to know school routines, so they settle quickly when they start school. The school's rigorous work on attendance means pupils attend school regularly.

Staff promote pupils' personal development and welfare well. Pupils learn about treating everyone fairly and with respect. The school celebrates the many languages known by members of the school community through its 'Languages Day'. Pupils learn about how to look after their mental health during 'Mental Health Week'.

The turbulent time has had an impact on staff morale. Some staff have concerns about their workload and well-being. Leaders and governors are taking steps to address this. However, this work is still in its infancy. Staff value the recent training they have had, including to teach early reading. Everyone is committed to raising aspirations and outcomes for pupils at Vallis First School.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff do not feel well supported with their workload and well-being. This is having a negative impact on staff morale. The school should work with staff to develop more positive working relationships so that all staff feel valued and their workload is considered.
- In some subjects, the school has not set out the knowledge that pupils need to remember in enough detail from the early years. This includes the key stage 2 reading curriculum. This means pupils struggle to recall their learning. The school should ensure that all curriculum planning from early years to Year 4 precisely defines the knowledge that pupils need to learn.
- Some leaders are new to their roles and have not yet monitored their areas of responsibility. This means they do not yet know the impact of the curriculum on pupils' learning. The school must ensure that all leaders have the knowledge and support they need to monitor the quality of education from Reception to Year 4.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in September 2014.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	123644
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10297927
Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	232
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	James Loughlin
Headteacher	Nicholas Firkins
Website	www.vallisfirstschool.org
Date of previous inspection	11 April 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There has been a change in headteacher since the previous inspection. The headteacher joined the school in September 2019.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- There is a before-school club for pupils who attend the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, school staff, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject

leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The inspector listened to pupils from Years 1, 2 and 3 read to a known adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, including at lunchtime and breaktimes. In addition, she met with pupils formally and informally to hear their views.
- The inspector considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. She also looked at responses to the pupil survey and responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Lakmini Harkus, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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