

18 March 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

**Vale Primary School
States of Guernsey**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I visited your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including building an ethos of teamwork, new approaches to teaching writing and the development of the curriculum. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Children across the Reception classes and primary stages are keen to learn and most are achieving well. Almost all children say that they enjoy coming to school and that there are adults they can talk to if they need help. Younger children in the Reception classes are increasingly deciding what and how they will learn during their play. They are learning to cooperate with each other by sharing toys and taking turns. They particularly enjoy role play activities, using their imagination to make sense of the world around them. For example, they enjoy being pilots and passengers on their pretend aeroplane. Children in the Reception classes use sticker folders to record what they feel about their own learning. Overall, teachers in the primary classes plan interesting activities that often enable children to learn together in groups. Children willingly contribute to projects and activities linked to their school and community, such as their recent work to commemorate the life and work of Victor Hugo. Children are involved in setting personal targets for their learning and in evaluating their own and their peers' work. In the best lessons, they are given opportunities to develop high-order skills such as creativity and problem-solving. However, in a few classes the quality of teaching and approaches to classroom management are too variable. In these classes, HM Inspectors observed some children becoming disengaged from their learning.

Children benefit from participating in a variety of school clubs and in sporting, cultural and musical activities and often achieve awards in inter-school and island competitions. For example, children were very proud to win first prize in the Floral Guernsey Award. The school should continue to develop approaches to tracking children's participation rates in clubs, leadership and citizenship activities and community events, in order to ensure that no child misses out.

The school is making steady progress in raising children's attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. The school identifies and supports children with barriers to learning well. In doing so, more children now attain the minimum expected levels of attainment. At Key Stage 2, by the end of Year 6, most children achieve the Bailiwick expectations of attaining Level 4b+ in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, more children achieve Level 5 in these areas of learning than compared to the Bailiwick average. At Key Stage 1, by the end of Year 2, most children achieve the Bailiwick expectations of attaining Level 2b+ in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, more children achieve Level 3 in these areas of learning compared to the Bailiwick average. HM Inspectors evaluated children's progress at each year group across the school. We found that, overall most children at each year group make similar good progress, with the exception of children at Year 2 and Year 6 who commendably demonstrate a higher rate of progress and achievement in their learning. There is scope to now further increase expectations of what children can achieve, and to accelerate the pace of children's learning as they move through Reception and Year 1, and then as they move through the different classes within Key Stage 2. The school should continue to raise attainment through ensuring more consistently effective learning and teaching across all stages. Staff should also ensure that appropriate strategies continue to be in place to improve the attendance of a few children.

Recent initiatives such as 'Talk for Writing' are clearly having a positive impact on the quality of children's written work. At all stages of the school, children demonstrate a good understanding of different forms of writing. For example, at Years 1 and 2, children use their 'text mapping' skills to retell traditional tales such as Jack and the Beanstalk, and use their creativity well to write their own imaginative stories about being trapped in a snow globe. At Year 5 children wrote interesting accounts of life in South Africa during 1848-1994. At Year 6 children wrote balanced arguments for and against the use of electric cars. In reading, by the end of Key Stage 1, children can use their knowledge and understanding about phonics and spelling to read unfamiliar texts and to find out information about Africa on the internet. Most children across Years 3 and 4 show a love of books and are beginning to read for pleasure. Recent changes staff have made to the teaching of guided reading at these stages are helping to engage more children in reading texts of different types, such as non-fiction texts about the Romans as part of their history topic. Throughout the junior stages, children develop their reading and writing skills through studying interesting class novels, often linked to other areas of their learning. For example, they read Victor Hugo's 'Toilers of the Sea', which provided a relevant link to their study of the local area and to the planned island-wide celebrations of the author's life. Across the school, almost all children listen well and speak confidently in pairs and small groups. Most are very articulate and can justify their opinions and express their views, at times using sophisticated language.

In mathematics, children demonstrate enthusiasm and motivation to learn. Participation in online 'Mathletics' challenges and charting their learning through their Maths Passports provides children with opportunities to personalise their learning. At Year 6 children confidently calculate challenging algebraic equations. At Year 5, groups of children use their knowledge about shapes in a creative way to design a challenge for the rest of the class to find lines of symmetry in the school playground. Most children in Year 3 are able to demonstrate their understanding of simple

equivalent fractions, and a few children can demonstrate their understanding of more complex fractions. Across the school, children are able to use practical materials to show their understanding. At Year 4 children demonstrate an understanding of 3D objects by making nets of chocolate boxes as part of their study of the novel *Charlie and The Chocolate Factory*. In Year 1, children use practical materials to investigate two and three digit numbers. In Year 2, children are able to share their learning about shape by discussing the features of angles with their shoulder partners.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

Vale Primary School is the first primary school in the Bailiwick to invest in training staff in advanced teaching techniques through the 'Outstanding Teacher Initiative'. In the best lessons and where staff have benefited from this professional learning, teachers use a range of approaches to ensure the pace of learning is at the correct level and that children maintain high levels of motivation. From classroom observations carried out across the school by HM Inspectors, most children are well-behaved and enjoy learning. They respond positively to praise and opportunities to discuss their learning. Across the school, where teaching is most effective, children are well supported by staff in lessons. Teachers provided children with a broad and varied range of activities, resources and experiences which, overall meet the needs of most children. In order to further meet children's needs, staff across the Reception and primary stages need to ensure that tasks and activities are better matched to provide greater support for children who need it and more challenge for highly able children. Some activities and experiences observed by HM Inspectors in some lessons were not challenging enough. Other tasks were too difficult for some. Better planned lessons will help meet all children's needs more effectively and help to reduce behavioural issues in a few classes.

Overall, relationships between staff and children are positive. The school has a welcoming and positive ethos. Most children who have special educational needs or who require some additional assistance in their learning are well supported. School staff and a range of professionals and partners work well together in the interests of children. Individual educational plans are in place for children who require additional support. Staff should review the targets they set within these plans to ensure targets are focused, measurable and take full account of the learning needs of children. A number of children and a few parents perceive that bullying is not always dealt with well by some adults in the school. As part of assemblies, through the personal and social health education programme and through training for staff, the school should continue to explore and discuss the topic of bullying in order that there is a clear understanding between children, staff and parents about what bullying is, how it can be prevented and how it is dealt with if it occurs.

Parents add value to the school community in important ways, including providing practical help in classes and on school trips. The Parent Teacher Association supports the school very well and helps to raise significant funds. Parents are positive about aspects of the work of the school. In the Education Scotland questionnaire survey issued prior to the validation visit, almost all parents agreed that their children enjoy learning at school and that they are progressing well in their learning. Parents like the text-alert system which they feel is a good way of keeping them up to date with important information. They feel that teachers are approachable and that most staff

know their children well. One half of parents who responded to the questionnaire did not think that the school asked for their views often enough. We have asked the school to continue to find ways to seek the views of all stakeholders. At the junior stages, parents would like more regular information on what their children are learning in class, how well they are progressing and clearer information on teachers' expectations about homework. Parents would like to see the school's website updated and used as a more effective means of communication. The school has well advanced plans to take this work forward.

The curriculum ensures a broad and balanced range of learning for all children. Staff across the school are working in teams to develop a shared understanding of the whole-school curriculum and to take improvements forward. There is now a whole school approach to the teaching of writing through the 'Talk for Writing' approach which is having a positive impact on children's motivation and engagement in learning. Staff have had a clear focus on developing the mathematics and numeracy curriculum. The teaching of mental mathematics across the school has improved and is promoted well in lessons. Parents are very positive about the recent mathematics evening and would like to see similar events for other curricular areas. The school has developed appropriate programmes for teaching social subjects such as geography and history. They have won a national 'quality mark' for approaches to teaching science. The school should build on their approaches to curriculum development further by ensuring there are clear frameworks for the teaching of skills in areas such as music, art and drama. The 'Readiness for School' programme is used well to support parents and children in making the transition from pre-school into Reception. Arrangements for children as they transfer to secondary school are strong and have been developed over recent years to ensure more effective joint working and sharing of information about prior learning and the needs of learners.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The headteacher knows the strengths and development needs of the school very well. Since his appointment in 2012, he has led a process of significant change very effectively. Despite a number of staffing challenges over recent years, including vacancies in key leadership posts, the headteacher has clearly had a positive impact on creating a whole school ethos; improving the environment for learning in classes; developing links with partners and the community, and in taking forward the development of the curriculum. The depute headteacher works closely with the headteacher. She carries out a varied remit well, including leading the development of mathematics across the school and acting as a Child Protection Officer. The assistant headteacher and recently appointed phase leaders and special educational needs coordinator are making increasingly valuable contributions to school improvement. As planned, the school should continue to develop the leadership roles and accountability of senior leaders and all staff. Along with staff, the leadership team should use self-evaluation approaches in a more focused way to bring about further improvements. Children across the school are now ready to be more involved in taking aspects of school improvement forward, for example through the work of the school council.

This validation visit found the following key strengths.

- Articulate and confident children who are keen to learn and are proud of their school.
- Positive partnerships with parents, professionals and the local community which enrich children's experiences.
- The commitment of staff to working in teams to improve the school.
- The headteacher's leadership in managing change, building an ethos of teamwork, and in securing improvements for the school community.

We discussed with staff and the Education Department how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to improve approaches to meeting the learning needs of all children.
- Continue to develop the leadership skills of the staff team and of children.
- Use self-evaluation approaches in a focused way to secure further improvements.

Here are the evaluations for Vale Primary School.

Improvements in performance	good
Learners' experiences	good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Meeting learning needs	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	good
Leadership of improvement and change	good

What happens at the end of the validation?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this visit. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, the Education Department will inform parents about the school's progress.

Lesley A Johnstone
HM Inspector

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Appendix 1

<p>Excellent</p> <p>6</p>	<p>Outstanding or sector leading</p> <p>An evaluation of excellent applies to provision which is sector leading. Pupils' experiences and achievements are of a very high quality. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the school. It implies that very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.</p>
<p>Very good</p> <p>5</p>	<p>Major strengths</p> <p>An evaluation of very good applies to provision characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish pupils' experiences. Whilst an evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to make provision without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the school will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.</p>
<p>Good</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Important strengths with areas for improvement</p> <p>An evaluation of good applies to provision characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of good represents a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significantly positive impact. However, the quality of pupils' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the school should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement.</p>
<p>Satisfactory</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Strengths just outweigh weaknesses</p> <p>An evaluation of satisfactory applies to provision characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of satisfactory indicates that pupils have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on pupils' experiences. However, while the weaknesses are not important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of pupils' experiences. It implies that the school should take action to address areas of weakness by building on its strengths.</p>
<p>Weak</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Important weaknesses</p> <p>An evaluation of weak applies to provision which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of weak may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strength, important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish pupils' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the school.</p>
<p>Unsatisfactory</p> <p>1</p>	<p>An evaluation of unsatisfactory applies when there are major weaknesses in provision requiring immediate remedial action. Pupils' experiences are at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the school.</p>

Validation report:	Vale Primary School
Validation dates:	w/b 29 February 2016
Managing Inspector:	Lesley Johnstone
Type of school:	Primary
Age range of learners:	4 - 11
Gender of learners:	Mixed
Number on roll:	493

Introduction

The validation was carried out by a team of four HM Inspectors, who spent three days in the school observing lessons, talking with learners and looking at their work, engaging in discussions with staff and parents, looking at school records and other documentation, and scrutinising responses to the pre-validation questionnaires.

The context of the school

Vale Primary School is a three form entry school in the north of the island and has, over the last four years, undergone considerable change. At the start of the academic year 2011-12 there were separate infant and junior schools on the same site, led by different headteachers. The current headteacher was initially appointed in January 2012 as head of Vale Junior School. In April 2013, the infant and junior schools amalgamated. In September 2014, St Sampson's Infant School closed and the children, staff and resources merged with Vale Primary School. There have been considerable changes to the staff and leadership team in the school. It is only from September 2015 that there has been a substantive senior leadership team in place with a complete leadership team from the end of February 2016, along with a full complement of teaching staff.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Learners' experiences

Across the school, most children are actively involved and motivated by their learning. There is a warm, friendly and relaxed atmosphere in the school. Children are comfortable in their surroundings and, overall, they have good relationships with teachers, staff and other children. Staff have begun to involve children more in identifying what they already know and what they would like to learn next, particularly when planning topics. Children are encouraged to have a voice through the school council and house groups. Children are positive about the improvements the school council has achieved, such as improving the choice of playground equipment and in establishing a rota for the use of the football area. All children are encouraged to give their views to their class representative on the school council, or to use the suggestion boxes.

Teachers use a range of techniques to encourage children to think and to become more involved in their learning. In most lessons children are given the opportunity to discuss and share their learning with a partner or within a group. The increasing use of digital technology is helping to motivate children. For example, in the Reception classes children enjoy using programmable toys and at Years 5 and 6 children confidently use tablets to record their successes in their work. Children are becoming more involved in assessing their own and their peers' work. In some classes teachers provide children with options on the level of challenge they can choose to work on. As a result, children are motivated and encouraged to extend their learning by opting into these challenges. The school should continue to develop ways to ensure that such examples of good practice are shared more widely across the school. At present, the approaches to managing children's behaviour are not entirely effective in all classes. The school should continue to review their current policy and procedures for managing behaviour to include approaches which promote the positive behaviour of children, where the use of praise and rewarding of good behaviour is actively encouraged.

Younger children in the Reception classes take advantage of the broad range of activities and resources which they choose to access, including when playing outdoors. For example they develop their skills and knowledge to design spiders or develop their awareness of numbers, letter and sounds. Staff use young children's interests well when deciding topics. They make children aware of what they might learn and what they want to learn. Young children, particularly enjoy role play activities, using their imagination to make sense of the world around them. For example, they enjoy being pilots and passengers on their pretend planes. Children in the Reception classes use sticker folders to record what they feel about their own learning.

Across the school, children have access to a range of lunchtime and after-school clubs which meet a range of interests. For example children can choose to participate in sports such as football, netball, cricket, athletics and hockey. Other clubs and activities include cycling proficiency, coding club, fit club, chess club, the '24' mathematics club, art club and board games. Parents are being encouraged to become more actively involved in their children's learning through more open-ended homework tasks and through open days in classes to share their children's learning.

Children benefit from taking part in a wide range of inter-school competitions such as the swimathon, tag rugby, football and netball tournaments. Children are involved in interesting projects to improve the local area and celebrate the history and culture of Guernsey. They enjoy visits around the island to enhance their learning, such as trips to the Folk Museum and to Castle Cornet. Younger children in the Reception classes were excited about going on a 'bear hunt' within the school grounds.

Improvements in performance

Children's achievements are shared at weekly celebration assemblies. Children are nominated by teachers and have the opportunity to become the class 'special person' and 'star of the week' for their achievements. Children's achievements in clubs and activities, such as swimming and football are also recognised at celebration assemblies. The school enables children to contribute to their local community in meaningful ways. Children are proud of their school and enjoy representing Vale Primary School at local events and competitions. Children from across the school benefit from taking part in the 'Game 24' island-wide mathematics competition. This develops their mental agility and team-working skills in a challenging context, with Vale being the current 2015 champions. Children are taking part in local events to celebrate the life and works of Victor Hugo. Children have been particularly successful in the Floral Guernsey Award, winning first prize for their 'outstanding contribution to the local community'.

Children are developing important leadership skills in a variety of ways. For example, in the lunchtime 'code club', a few children take on leadership roles to support the class teacher and to mentor their peers. These children are very proud of their role and enjoy sharing their knowledge more widely with their friends. Older children have opportunities to be playground buddies and play leaders to support younger children in the playground. Many children also act as class monitors, lunchtime monitors, reading buddies and librarians. There is scope to increase further the responsibility children take across the school and for leading their own learning. For example, children could be given more opportunities to plan and organise school events.

Children develop their citizenship skills well through events like the Liberation Day celebrations. For example, children in Year 6 serve tea to residents from nearby senior citizens' homes. Children helped to respond to a traffic congestion issue around the school by promoting cycling as an alternative to travelling by car. As a result, more children now cycle to school and more have achieved their cycling proficiency award.

The school is very proud of the range of fund raising activities in which they participate. They have raised money for local and national charities. The school should continue to develop approaches to tracking children's participation rates in clubs, leadership and citizenship activities and community events, in order to determine the skills children are developing and to ensure that no child misses out.

The school is involved in developing a new island-wide learning tool which is being used by all Reception class teachers and learning support assistants to help monitor and track young children's progress. This is at an early stage of development and

implementation. Reception class staff are positive about this initiative and report that it is helping them to identify children's strengths and next steps in learning.

Overall, the school is making steady progress in raising children's attainment. The school identifies and supports children with barriers to learning well. In doing so, more children now attain minimum expected levels of attainment. At Key Stage 2, by the end of Year 6, most children achieve the Bailiwick expectations of attaining L4b+ in reading, writing and mathematics, and more children achieve L5 in these areas of learning than compared to the Bailiwick average. At Key Stage 1, by the end of Year 2, most children achieve the Bailiwick expectations of attaining L2b+ in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, more children achieve Level 3 in these areas of learning compared to the Bailiwick average. HM Inspectors evaluated children's progress at each year group across the school. Overall most children at each year group make similar good progress with the exception of children at Year 2 and Year 6, who commendably demonstrate a higher rate of progress and achievement in their learning. There is scope to now further increase expectations and the pace of children's learning as they move through Reception and Year 1, and as they move through the different classes within Key Stage 2.

Overall children make good progress in writing. Recent initiatives such as 'Talk for Writing' are clearly having a positive impact on the quality of children's writing. At all stages of the school, children demonstrate a good understanding of a range of genres. For example, at Years 1 and 2, children use their 'text mapping' skills to retell traditional tales such as Jack and the Beanstalk, and use their creativity well to write their own imaginative stories about being trapped in a snow globe. At Year 5 children wrote interesting accounts of life in South Africa during 1848-1994. Their writing communicated clearly how apartheid affected individuals in South Africa.

At Year 6 children wrote balanced arguments for and against the use of electric cars. They demonstrated good use of imperative verbs and rhetorical questions with well-constructed introductory and concluding paragraphs. Children are also making appropriate progress in developing and applying reading skills. By the end of Key Stage 1, children can use their knowledge and understanding about phonics and spelling to read and decipher new and challenging words and texts, including finding out information on the Internet. Most children across Years 3 and 4 show a love of books and are beginning to read for pleasure. Recent changes made to approaches to the teaching of reading at these stages are helping to engage more children in reading texts of different types, for example non-fiction text on The Romans as part of their history topic. Throughout the junior stages, children develop their reading and writing skills through studying interesting class novels, often linked to other areas of their learning. For example, they read Victor Hugo's 'Toilers of the Sea', which provided a relevant link to their study of the local area and to the planned island-wide celebrations of the author's life. We have asked teachers to ensure that through this approach to guided reading, that the level of challenge of text is appropriate to all children. Across the school, almost all children listen well and speak confidently in pairs and small groups. Most are very articulate and can justify their opinions and express their views, at times using sophisticated language. Children at Year 5 work very effectively in small groups, exploring and communicating their ideas about unusual and unfamiliar Victorian inventions. Collaboratively they demonstrate audience awareness and use appropriate vocabulary to persuade 'Lord Alan Sugar' to

hire their team and invest in their invention. At Year 2, children listen carefully to excerpts from Tchaikovsky's 'The Nutcracker' in order to compare and contrast the mood and tempo of different pieces of music.

In mathematics, children demonstrate enthusiasm and motivation to learn. Participation in online 'Mathletics' challenges and charting their learning through their Maths Passports provides children with opportunities to personalise their learning. Overall, they are making good progress in mathematics across the school. At Year 6 children confidently calculate challenging algebraic equations. At Year 5, groups of children use their knowledge about shapes and use digital technology in a creative way to design a challenge for the rest of the class to find lines of symmetry in the school playground. Most children in Year 3 are able to demonstrate their understanding of simple equivalent fractions, and a few children can demonstrate their understanding of equivalence in more complex fractions. Children are able to use practical materials to show their understanding. At Year 4 children demonstrate an understanding of 3D objects by making nets of chocolate boxes as part of their study of the novel Charlie and The Chocolate Factory. In Year 1, children use practical materials to investigate 2 and 3 digit numbers. In Year 2, children are able to share their learning about shape by discussing the features of angles with their shoulder partners.

The school's current and recent improvement plan priorities have been well-judged and take full account of the context of the school. As the three schools merged, the need for a consistent approach to learning and teaching across the school team was correctly identified by the headteacher through self-evaluation processes. Initiatives to up-skill teachers in advanced teaching techniques and improving approaches to writing are a few of the strategies that have been implemented to improve outcomes for children. The school should continue to raise attainment through ensuring more consistently effective learning and teaching across all stages. Staff should also ensure that appropriate strategies are in place to improve the attendance of a few children.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

Teaching for effective learning

Overall, relationships between staff and children are positive. Across the school, most teachers plan well-paced lessons with a variety of approaches that encourage children to be curious and creative. For example, in science children are encouraged to explore filtration and they provide high quality responses to improve the experiment for efficiency. Across the school staff plan learning using collaborative and problem solving approaches. Children are encouraged to work together to complete tasks.

Vale Primary School is the first primary school in the Bailiwick to invest in training staff in advanced teaching techniques through the 'Outstanding Teacher Initiative' (OTI). In the best lessons and where staff have benefited from this professional learning, teachers use a range of approaches to ensure the pace of learning is at the correct level and that children maintain high levels of motivation. From classroom observations carried out by HM Inspectors, most children are well-behaved and enjoy learning. They respond positively to praise and opportunities to discuss their learning. Real life learning experiences are increasingly featuring in the school. For example, in

social subjects children learn about the local environment through the 'Through the Portal' project. They explore the Neolithic burial grounds within the playground and across the island. Overall, staff communicate clearly with children. Learning intentions and success criteria are shared by teachers in all lessons. Staff set targets for children across different areas of their learning. Children are encouraged to provide feedback on their learning through the plenary sessions at the end of lessons. However, the quality of teaching and approaches to classroom management are too variable in a few classes. In these classes, HM Inspectors observed some children becoming disengaged from their learning. The school should continue with their plans for teachers to share and embed good classroom practice.

Meeting learning needs

Overall, most children who have special educational needs or who require some additional support in their learning are being well supported. The school is developing and refining systems to help staff identify children's particular needs and to track their progress, including those who have more complex needs. The recently appointed Special Educational Needs Coordinator is working to improve the school's arrangements for keeping all of the information on specific children in one place, in order that staff can make better use of available information to better meet individual children's needs. School staff and a range of professionals and partners work well together in the interests of children. Children with special educational needs are being supported well through staff and partners working together. For example, literacy specialist teachers work well with individual children across the school. Data shows that their interventions are having a positive impact on individual children's progress in reading. We have asked the school to keep under review the practice of extracting children from lessons to receive individual support or tuition, in order that they do not miss out on other areas of their learning. The educational psychologist engages well with the school, offering advice and carrying out assessments for particular children. Speech and language therapists work with identified children. They also give staff general advice on how to support children's language skills in classes. Support is also given from partners to support children with specific learning and behavioural difficulties. Individual educational plans are in place for children who require additional support. Staff should review the targets they set within these plans to ensure they are focused, measurable and take full account of the learning needs of children.

Across the school, where teaching is most effective, children are well supported by staff in lessons. Teachers provided children with a broad and varied range of activities, resources and experiences which, overall meet the needs of most children. In order to further meet children's needs, staff across the Reception and primary stages need to ensure that tasks and activities are better matched to provide greater support for children who need it and more challenge for highly able children. Some activities and experiences observed by HM Inspectors in some lessons did not demand much of children. Other tasks were too difficult for some. Better planned lessons will help meet all children's needs more effectively and help to reduce behavioural issues in a few classes.

A number of children and a few parents perceive that bullying is not always dealt with well by some adults in the school. As part of assemblies, through the personal and social health education (PSHE) programme and through training for staff, the school

should continue to explore and discuss the topic of bullying in order that there is a clear understanding between children, staff and parents about what bullying is, how it can be prevented and how it is dealt with if it occurs. We have asked the school to review how they record incidents, particularly at intervals and lunchtimes, so that they can more easily identify patterns of potential bullying and deal with this promptly.

Curriculum

Staff across the school are working in teams to develop a shared understanding of the whole-school curriculum and to take improvements forward. As a result, steps have been taken to improve the approaches to teaching reading in early years with a new approach to teaching phonics. The school libraries have been improved to provide children with better access to books to read for pleasure. A range of author visits have been introduced. The libraries are now better organised to allow staff to teach skills needed in non-fiction reading. Updated methods of delivering guided reading have been introduced across most classes to improve how children engage with text. There is now a whole school approach to the teaching of writing through the 'Talk for Writing' approach which is having a positive impact on children's motivation and engagement in learning.

Staff have had a clear focus on developing the mathematics and numeracy curriculum. There has been a renewed focus on children having access to practical materials to develop and support their mathematical thinking. The teaching of mental mathematics across the school has improved and is promoted well in lessons. More opportunities for outdoor learning in mathematics and presenting mathematics in real-life contexts are being encouraged.

Staff are becoming more responsive to the interests of children. Children are involved in identifying what they would like to explore through topics by identifying what they know already and would now like to find out about. Staff use progression skills frameworks to inform their planning of teaching and learning across all subject areas. At each year group, staff plan learning and teaching fully with their stage partners. The Guernsey Sports Commission and a range of health professionals help the school to deliver the PSHE programme across the school. This includes new approaches to promoting the importance of the mental and emotional health of children. The curriculum for children is enhanced further through positive links with community partners such as local museums, theatre groups, The Red Cross, Every Child Our Future volunteers and the PACE and Island FM radio station.

The school has developed appropriate programmes for teaching social subjects such as geography and history. They have won a national 'quality mark' for approaches to teaching science. The school should build on their approaches to curriculum development further by ensuring there are clear frameworks for the teaching of skills in areas such as music, art and drama. We have asked staff to make more effective use of timetabling within the curriculum to ensure all subject areas and cross-curricular work receive appropriate time and to make the most of time for teaching.

The 'Readiness for School' programme is used well to support parents and children in making the transition from pre-school to Reception. Arrangements for children as they transfer to secondary school are strong and have been developed over recent years to

ensure more effective joint working and sharing of information about prior learning and the needs of learners. Staff work well with local secondary schools to provide appropriate support for all children as they move to secondary. Children with special educational needs receive appropriate additional support from secondary school staff prior to starting in Year 7. Positive approaches to creating learning topics that are delivered at the end of Year 6 and again at the beginning of Year 7 help to provide continuity in learning for children as they move to secondary school.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Improvement through self-evaluation

With valuable support from the Education Department, the headteacher has successfully created the conditions to build an ethos of collegiality amongst the amalgamated staff teams. As a result, a growing spirit of teamwork is evident and teachers are increasingly taking more ownership and responsibility in helping to improve the school. Across the school, there are examples of staff and leaders seeking out good practice from other schools in Guernsey and beyond. Overall, there is a clear commitment from staff to the continued review and development of their practice and in the quality of curricular experiences they offer children. This was reflected in the high level of engagement of staff with HM Inspectors throughout the validation process. Staffs' professional learning is well judged and supports an appropriate blend of local and school priorities for improvement, as well as developing individual teachers' skills. As a result, staff are being increasingly empowered to lead learning within their own classes, in stage teams and in working groups to develop the curriculum.

Senior leaders carry out a range of monitoring activities to evaluate the strengths and areas for development across the school. This includes carrying out a programme of learning walks, lesson observations and scrutiny of children's work. Members of the leadership team who have been more recently appointed are gaining important skills and experience in carrying out these self-evaluation approaches across the school. Teachers use a range of assessment approaches to measure children's progress in their learning. They are working with their stage partners to plan and assess children's learning together. The headteacher and depute headteacher monitor the overall patterns and trends in children's attainment across the school. They carry out a programme of pupil progress meetings with teachers at each stage of the school in order to check on standards and progress. At Years Reception, 2 and 6, teachers participate in well-established local and external moderation processes to check their assessments are accurate. These are now also in place in Years 1, 3, 4 and 5. The school should continue to develop staffs' confidence at all stages in assessing children's progress in order to provide robust and reliable assessment data. As the leadership team works together to agree future approaches to monitoring and evaluating their areas of responsibility, they should ensure that their procedures are robust and rigorous, and that their feedback to staff continues to be appropriately challenging where necessary, as well as supportive. The senior leadership team should develop their self-evaluation systems further by adopting a more focused approach to evaluating standards across the school, looking closely at what matters and on the impact and outcomes for children.

Parents are involved in evaluating the work of the school in a few ways, including through a survey, providing feedback on events such as the popular mathematics curriculum evening and in the setting up of a before-school club. In the most effective classes, children are asked for their opinions on a range of themes in connection with their learning, including how and what they want to learn. Children in the school council are proud of the improvements they have helped to secure, such as increasing the range of equipment in the playground. The school should consider using the school council and other focus groups of children to help evaluate the quality of learning and teaching across the school.

Leadership of improvement and change

Since his appointment, the headteacher has led process of significant change very effectively. Over the two amalgamation processes, he has managed the pace of change very well. Despite a number of staffing challenges over recent years, including vacancies in key leadership posts, and having to spend considerable periods of time in a teaching capacity, the headteacher has clearly had a positive impact on creating a whole school ethos; improving the environment for learning in classes; developing links with partners and the community, and in taking forward the development of the curriculum. The headteacher has established productive working relationships across and beyond the school community. The headteacher demonstrates calm and purposeful leadership. He is knowledgeable, resilient and focused on securing continuous improvement by promoting leadership and accountability at all levels across the school, and in aiming to achieve high standards for all learners. The depute headteacher works closely with the headteacher. She carries out a varied remit well, including leading the development of mathematics across the school, developing partnerships with the local community that enhance the curriculum and by acting as the co-Child Protection Officer.

The headteacher is skilled in identifying the strengths of the whole staff team and using these strengths to the benefit of the school. The assistant headteacher, phase leaders and subject leaders are making increasingly valuable contributions to leading improvements across the school. As planned, the school should continue to develop the leadership roles and remits of senior leaders and all staff. For example the role of phase leaders should be developed in order that they take a lead role across year groups and provide leadership and direction for teachers and support staff. They should take on responsibility for analysing data and providing feedback to the senior leadership team about progress within each year group and across the phase. To improve the consistency of learning and teaching across the stages, the school should continue to develop systematic ways for the very best practice in learning to be shared and embedded. To date, eight teachers have completed the OTI advanced teaching skills programme and in their classes, the positive impact of their professional learning on children's experiences is clear. Commendably, the headteacher has deployed these teachers to different stages of the school in order to facilitate the sharing of this good practice. As planned, staff should now be encouraged to develop as reflective and enquiring practitioners who are able to act as critical friends to one another.

Senior leaders have taken steps to facilitate opportunities for staff to meet together in their stage groups and to work together in curriculum teams to take forward development priorities. Staff receive feedback from senior leaders following lesson

observations. This feedback identifies the strengths and areas for further development in their teaching. In line with the expectations of the Education Department, all staff participate in an appropriate performance management process that highlights where they would benefit from professional learning opportunities which will support and challenge their practice.

Stakeholders' views

Parents are positive about aspects of the work of the school. In the Education Scotland questionnaire survey issued prior to the validation visit, almost all parents agreed that their children enjoy learning at school and that they are progressing well in their learning. Parents like the text-alert system which they feel is a good way of keeping them up to date with important information. They feel that teachers are approachable and that most staff know their children well. One half of parents who responded to the questionnaire did not think that the school asked for their views often enough. We have asked the school to continue to seek the views of all stakeholders, and to develop ways to further engage and consult with parents on key areas of school life. The school should also develop ways to communicate the results of any consultative exercises to stakeholders, as well as any actions taken forward as a result of feedback. There were mixed views amongst parents about the way that the school has dealt with their concerns. Parents appreciate the curriculum evenings organised by teachers, such as the mathematics event. At the junior stages, parents would like more regular information on what their children are learning in class, how well they are progressing and clearer information on teachers' expectations about homework. Parents would like to see the school's website updated and used as a more effective means of communication. The school has well advanced plans to take this work forward and at the time of the validation visit were awaiting confirmation from the appropriate States department in order that they can launch their new and improved website. Parents themselves add value to the school community in important ways, including providing practical help in classes and on school trips. The school should consider offering training for parents who volunteer to help in classes on a regular basis. The Parent Teacher Association supports the school very well and helps to raise significant funds. Most children told HM Inspectors that they feel safe and cared for in school. Most feel that there are adults in school they can speak to if they are upset or worried about something. Children feel that almost all staff make sure that pupils behave well, but that some staff are better at this than others.

Summary

Capacity for improvement

We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve. The headteacher has an accurate view of the school's strengths and priorities for further development. HM Inspectors were able to validate almost all of the school's own judgements as part of the validation visit. The new leadership team demonstrates a growing capacity to work together to continue to improve standards.

This validation visit found the following key strengths.

- Articulate and confident children who are keen to learn and are proud of their school.
- Positive partnerships with parents, professionals and the local community which enrich children's experiences.
- The commitment of staff to working in teams to improve the school.
- The headteacher's leadership in managing change, building an ethos of teamwork, and in securing improvements for the school community.

We discussed with staff and the Education Department how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to improve approaches to meeting the learning needs of all children.
- Continue to develop the leadership skills of the staff team and of children.
- Use self-evaluation approaches in a focused way to secure further improvements.

Here are the evaluations for Vale Primary School.

Improvements in performance	good
Learners' experiences	good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Meeting learning needs	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	good
Leadership of improvement and change	good

What happens at the end of the validation?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this validation. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, the Education Department will inform parents about the school's progress.

Lesley A Johnstone
HM Inspector

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Appendix 1

<p>Excellent</p> <p>6</p>	<p>Outstanding or sector leading</p> <p>An evaluation of excellent applies to provision which is sector leading. Pupils' experiences and achievements are of a very high quality. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the school. It implies that very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.</p>
<p>Very good</p> <p>5</p>	<p>Major strengths</p> <p>An evaluation of very good applies to provision characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish pupils' experiences. Whilst an evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to make provision without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the school will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.</p>
<p>Good</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Important strengths with areas for improvement</p> <p>An evaluation of good applies to provision characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of good represents a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significantly positive impact. However, the quality of pupils' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the school should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement.</p>
<p>Satisfactory</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Strengths just outweigh weaknesses</p> <p>An evaluation of satisfactory applies to provision characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of satisfactory indicates that pupils have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on pupils' experiences. However, while the weaknesses are not important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of pupils' experiences. It implies that the school should take action to address areas of weakness by building on its strengths.</p>
<p>Weak</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Important weaknesses</p> <p>An evaluation of weak applies to provision which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of weak may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strength, important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish pupils' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the school.</p>
<p>Unsatisfactory</p> <p>1</p>	<p>An evaluation of unsatisfactory applies when there are major weaknesses in provision requiring immediate remedial action. Pupils' experiences are at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the school.</p>