

Valley Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	104137
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	377020
Inspection dates	7–8 March 2012
Lead inspector	Christine Field

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	93
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barry Dutton
Headteacher	Dawn Kelly
Date of previous school inspection	5 June 2009
School address	Blakenall Heath Blakenall Walsall WS3 1HT
Telephone number	01922 710518
Fax number	01922 710518
Email address	Postbox@valley.walsall.sch.uk

Age group	3–4
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Introduction

Inspection team

Christine Field

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice by an additional inspector. The inspector observed teaching and learning in ten part-lessons, with over four hours in total spent observing two teachers and five teaching assistants. She held meetings with members of the governing body, staff, parents and carers. The inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. She observed the school's work and looked at the school improvement plan, assessment information, teachers' planning, governing body minutes, policies, children's work and safeguarding procedures. She also analysed questionnaires returned by thirty parents and carers and six staff.

Information about the school

The nursery school is average in size and open 50 weeks a year from 8.00am to 5.00pm. It serves the most disadvantaged ward in Walsall, itself ranked as the 45th most disadvantaged district in England. Children spend between three and six terms attending either in a morning or afternoon before moving on to Reception classes in a number of local schools. The vast majority of children are from White British backgrounds, with a very small number from Polish backgrounds who are learning to speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled children and those who have special educational needs is similar to other nursery schools. However, the proportion at school action plus is relatively high. Five children are currently being assessed for a statement of special educational needs.

The nursery school is co-located with Blakenall Children's Centre which was the subject of a separate Ofsted inspection in February 2012.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. The exciting and engaging curriculum, coupled with excellent teaching, ensures that all children achieve exceptionally well from starting points that are well below levels expected for the children’s ages.
- Children thrive because of the outstanding attention paid to their academic success and personal well-being. Personal achievement is celebrated at the close of sessions where good work is discussed and shared. As a consequence, the children readily embrace the next challenge set for them. By the time they leave to join Reception classes, boys and girls have become confident and independent learners. Occasionally, the more able learners are not sufficiently challenged in their reading.
- Children have very keen attitudes to learning because they are very well taught. They thoroughly enjoy a wide and varied range of engaging experiences, both indoors and outside. Precise assessments inform the planning of each child’s next steps in learning. This ensures that their progress in all areas of learning moves forward at a very good pace.
- The staff’s exceptionally caring approach results in everyone feeling safe. The children’s spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceedingly well fostered and, as a result, they show kindness to one another and uphold the well-established routines that keep them very well protected. Children told the inspector that they, ‘love being in the nursery’. Relationships are excellent, as is their behaviour.
- The headteacher’s outstanding leadership underpins the school’s success. She is ably supported by a well-bonded staff team and a very effective governing body which seeks excellence in all aspects of practice and provision. Since the previous inspection, the area identified in need of improvement has been tackled effectively. Highly effective performance management strategies support the staff’s ongoing professional development and the children’s rapid

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progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the challenge for the more able children in building their early reading skills so that their progress in lessons accelerates.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The inspector agrees with the unanimous opinion of parents and carers that their children are happy at school and about how well they are doing. 'The school is simply fantastic and does so much for our children, I can't wait for my next daughter to start' is a comment typical of many.

From a well-below-average start, all children, including the most vulnerable, make exceptional progress and achieve successfully because of the very close attention paid to their personal learning needs and next steps development. By the time they transfer to Reception, the vast majority are working at the level expected for their age. Disabled children and those who have special educational needs, including those awaiting statements, achieve very well. This is because no time is lost in identifying individual learning and behaviour needs and ensuring that they receive the expert help they need to progress at the same rate as others. The same high quality support helps those who speak English as an additional language. More-able children learn at a very good pace in specific small group mathematics sessions that are organised to provide lots of challenge. However, the opportunities to promote their reading skills do not always maximise achievement. The achievement of boys in communication, language and literacy was pinpointed as an issue last year and the school has worked effectively to narrow the achievement gap. This has been tackled through focusing attention on learning styles. For example, children are developing pencil control through the use of tablet computers and they use writing in role play activities, such as a travel agent, where form filling and writing messages are essential and much-enjoyed tasks.

Children demonstrate a huge appetite for learning because of the exciting and expertly planned experiences provided. They work independently for prolonged periods with sustained interest and engagement. They persevere with tasks, for example when designing and making cardboard replicas of their homes. Their spoken language, including for those who speak English as an additional language, moves on at a brisk pace as the staff take every opportunity to ask probing questions about what the children are doing and what might happen next. 'Superheroes', dressed as spider-man or batman, use their imagination very creatively in positive play. They are eager to try out new things such as riding two-wheel bicycles furiously around the track as they 'fly' to their next assignment and help someone in danger. This is typical of how the children's learning is successfully promoted by following their

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interests and making excellent use of the richly resourced play areas.

Quality of teaching

Every parent and carer responding to the Ofsted questionnaire agrees that their children are well taught and make good progress. 'The children's confidence as learners goes through the roof' sums up the positive views expressed. Their positive views are confirmed by the inspector.

Teaching is outstanding and children are enabled to take full advantage of the rich and vibrant curriculum that promotes excellence in all the areas they experience. It promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very successfully. The staff are very skilled at capturing the children's imagination. This was evident, for example, when a letter from a dragon arrived asking for their help. The ensuing adventure took them on a journey to a castle and involved map reading, following clues, circumnavigating a forest, locating the dragon's den and finally knocking on the big oak castle door! Their enjoyment in finding out new things and 'learning by doing' are evident in all activities. The sheer delight of children experimenting with different containers as they filled a rain pipe and made it tip to the next was a joy to see. Sweeping up the water that had sloshed onto the play area and ensuring it went down the drain was a pleasure not a chore and was accomplished with perseverance and accuracy.

Precise ongoing assessments, underpinned by very comprehensive data on progress, inform the very well-planned lessons. Adults carefully and conscientiously look, listen and note what all children do from day to day and use this to target their next steps. Information is recorded in attractive 'Learning Diaries' which skilfully capture children's progress in lessons and over time. The staff have designated groups when they undertake teaching with specific foci, for example daily letters and sounds and problem-solving. They also work as a very expert team in assisting children's positive learning during the child-initiated sessions where every opportunity is taken to promote purposeful talk. Children are helped to become reflective learners, with the close of sessions used well to celebrate personal achievements.

Small group work and one-to-one tuition are positive features in helping Polish children build confident English language skills. Disabled children and those who have special education needs benefit from individual work on personal targets and from the specialist support provided by a wealth of educational and medical support agencies with which the school has forged very strong links. As a result, these children make excellent progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Children clearly enjoy school immensely, as is evident in their happy, smiling faces when they arrive punctually to the morning or afternoon sessions. The inspector's view of behaviour matches the extremely positive views of parents about safety and behaviour. No incidents of bullying or racism have been recorded or reported.

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The staff are excellent role models and the children quickly learn by example, treating everyone with respect and consideration. During 'tidy up time', a child accidentally bumped into another, said 'sorry' and made sure his friend was unhurt. 'Special helpers' take turns to help their teachers set out equipment and take responsibility for key jobs. They are taught to handle equipment carefully and behave sensibly whilst also taking calculated risks, for example in practising different ways to travel down a slide and land safely. Children readily engage in a wide range of activities, some of which they select for themselves and others that are directed by the teachers. This effective combination enables children to gain independence while also learning how to concentrate and learn new things in a stimulating and interesting way. Attendance is monitored rigorously and is improving over time. The school is very supportive of families who have particular difficulties and have established collection arrangements to avoid their children missing school.

Leadership and management

The headteacher's relentless pursuit of her vision to 'be ambitious for everyone' is at the heart of the school's sustained high quality and its excellent outcomes. Parents recognise the part she plays in taking the school forward: 'She has done so much for this community', 'Children come first', 'You can achieve anything at Valley' are typical comments. Staff also value working in a culture that enables them to keep forward-focused and share best practice. They identify the leadership as reflecting the highest expectations for staff and children. One staff comment sums up their views, 'The head always expects 110%'. Monitoring is rigorous and self-evaluation processes are well embedded and linked securely to school improvement priorities. The professional development programme and ongoing performance management are key features that contribute to the children's outstanding achievement and the school's sustained capacity for improvement.

The governing body plays a key role in the leadership of the school and includes parents and representatives from the community. They have a firm grasp of the school's effectiveness and provide support and challenge as required. Together with the headteacher, they seek best value, ensure equalities are promoted and are totally focused on 'doing their very best for the children'. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. A 'safeguarding champion' leads on child protection matters and, together with exemplary teamwork across agencies, ensures that there is a strong safety net of support for children and families, who are very well protected.

The rich curriculum is central to the children's love of school. Their imagination, curiosity, confidence and desire for learning are exceptionally well fostered through daily literacy and numeracy sessions and such diverse experiences as hunting for bugs, making sculptures in the style of Andy Goldsworthy and cutting up fruit in the 'snack shop'. The school's highly effective promotion of the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development helps them to learn quickly how to be responsible members of the school community. They look after each other and 'give a friend a

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hug' during singing time and show real curiosity as 'Boomer the hen' lays an egg. Their appreciation of different cultures is fostered successfully when they learn about Diwali, Hanukah and Christianity as part of a celebration about light.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

12 March 2012

Dear Children



Inspection of Valley Nursery School, Walsall, WS3 1HT

Thank you so much for your warm welcome when I visited your nursery school. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit, talking with you and your parents and seeing all the exciting things you do every day. Your nursery is outstanding and makes sure that all of you achieve very successfully and transfer smoothly to Reception classes as confident and independent learners. The staff are highly skilled at looking after you, keeping you safe and making sure you do as well as you can in everything you do. The headteacher, governors and staff are expert at making sure your school goes from strength to strength.

These are just some of the things that are 'first-rate'.

- It is a very happy, safe and fun place to be.
- You make outstanding progress in your learning.
- You love coming to school because your teachers are expert at making sure there is always something to interest you and so you learn lots.
- The activities you can choose or which teachers ask you to do are really excellent and you relish the next challenge because your achievements are celebrated – how good are the stickers!
- You try your very best at everything you do, you are kind to one another, work very well in groups and sit beautifully during the celebration assembly which was quite long. Your behaviour is excellent. It is great to see you looking after the chicks and Suzi the hamster with such care.
- You are always curious and use your imagination very well indeed, especially when you are being 'superheroes'.

I have asked your teachers to improve one thing to help you learn even more. Some of you are building independent reading skills but you do not always accomplish as much as you could in lessons and need a bit more challenge.

You can help by telling your teacher if you are ready for harder work and by always doing your best.

Yours sincerely

Christine Field
Lead inspector

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