

# Vermont School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	116625
<b>Local Authority</b>	Southampton
<b>Inspection number</b>	357994
<b>Inspection dates</b>	26–27 January 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Anne Duffy HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	26
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	John Lilly
<b>Headteacher</b>	Barry Smith
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	8 October 2007
<b>School address</b>	Vermont Close Southampton SO16 7LT
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector observed eight lessons or parts of lessons and five teachers. She also held meetings with staff, governors, parents and pupils. She observed the school's work, and looked at documentation and policies, including the school's tracking of pupils' progress, the school improvement plan and arrangements for safeguarding. The inspector also studied pupil and staff questionnaires and the 10 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. She looked in detail at two key areas.

- The accuracy of the school's self-evaluation and its capacity for continuing improvement as it begins a period of new leadership.
- The impact of the school's work in improving pupils' behaviour for learning and supporting pupil achievement.

## Information about the school

Vermont is a special school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The vast majority are boys, and a significant minority have additional learning needs, sometimes associated with mental health difficulties. All have a statement of special educational needs or are in the process of being assessed. Many pupils have had previous negative experiences of school, including sustained periods of non-attendance. The school hosts an inclusion centre for pupils who have been excluded from their local schools. Staff also provide an outreach service offering advice and training for colleagues in mainstream schools. The school holds National Healthy Schools Status and an Investors in People award.

The previous headteacher retired in December 2010 and the new headteacher took up post in January 2011.

**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: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

Vermont is a satisfactory school which is committed to improvement. Against a background of previously negative educational experiences, many pupils make good progress in overcoming their reluctance to learn. The school, and in particular the inclusion centre, is often successful in supporting a return to mainstream education for pupils who were originally reluctant attenders. As one parent wrote, 'The Vermont School has changed my child's life.'

Overall, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. The school has a strong focus upon improving behaviour and addressing the social and emotional needs of its pupils, with evident impact. Recently, a new tracking system has been introduced to ensure that sufficiently challenging targets are being set for pupils' academic progress. However, the school's focus on academic achievement has not been as strong as for other aspects of the pupils' development and analysis of their attainment and progress is not yet rigorous enough. Pupils themselves are not all clear about what levels they are working at or how they can improve. They do not always receive clear enough feedback to help them with this.

The monitoring of teaching has raised expectations. While rightly focusing on effective behaviour management and matching activities to different pupils or groups of pupils, it has been less focused on the impact that these aspects have on pupils' learning and progress. As a result, although they make satisfactory progress overall, some pupils are not helped to achieve of their best. This is due in part to planning which focuses upon activities, and what the pupils will do, rather than being based on secure, ongoing assessment and what pupils need to learn. While individual teachers work hard to maintain attractive displays in their classrooms, not all areas of the school provide a suitable or age-appropriate environment that is conducive to effective learning.

The governing body is closely involved in the running of the school and demonstrates a clear commitment to fulfilling its duties and responsibilities. However, self-evaluation and the monitoring of the school's effectiveness have sometimes relied too heavily on reports from the headteacher, rather than the involvement of all concerned. As a result, some processes have not been monitored rigorously enough or ensured that the school is wholly accurate in the evaluation of its work. The school currently has satisfactory capacity to improve further, although the newly structured senior leadership team is ambitious for its future.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the school's capacity to improve further by:

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- ensuring that policies and practices are monitored and reviewed regularly and robustly
- ensuring that self-evaluation involves staff at all levels as well as other stakeholders.
- Raise the profile of learning and academic progress across the school by:
  - creating a suitable and age-appropriate environment for learning
  - ensuring that teaching is consistently based upon secure ongoing assessment and focused upon what pupils will learn rather than do
  - ensuring that feedback to pupils, including marking, is clear and in a format that helps them to understand how to improve their work and what they are aiming for.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****3**

Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning. They consistently make the most progress in personal and social education. Individual attainment varies according to the starting point and ability of each pupil and is often affected by pupils' additional needs. For the large majority, levels of attainment are low, but a few pupils reach levels that are equal to those expected nationally. The school's effective action ensures that the few girls are not disadvantaged by their relatively small number. Pupils, as well as their parents, are generally very positive about the difference that Vermont School makes to their attitude to school and learning. As one pupil said, 'This school has helped me to be a good reader.' Overall, younger pupils and those in the pupil inclusion centre make greater strides in their learning. This supports the school's view that early intervention is most effective in meeting the particular needs of these children.

Although attendance overall remains low, the large majority of pupils make a marked improvement in their attendance as a result of attending Vermont School. Pupils generally settle well and begin to feel secure in a range of situations. As a result, they are increasingly willing to attempt new tasks with diminishing anxiety. This was evident in one lesson where, as part of their topic on Africa, pupils tasted foods that they did not know. In another lesson, two boys were increasingly motivated to improve their knowledge of multiplication tables by recording their score on the interactive whiteboard without becoming upset if they were not 'winning'.

Pupils know their behaviour targets and respond very positively to rewards for achieving them. They also have learning targets but these are often general, or concerned with attitudes to learning, such as improving handwriting or listening, rather than gaining skills or knowledge. As a result, pupils are less motivated in what they perceive as 'work' than in other aspects of school life. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It is enhanced by interesting assemblies and lessons which extend their knowledge and understanding of other groups and cultures and in which they show increasingly mature attitudes and empathy with others. Pupils make good use of the extensive grounds and particularly enjoy physical activity outside school, including using the local swimming pool and developing cycling proficiency. Reflecting the school's National Healthy Schools Status, pupils demonstrate that they understand how to lead healthy lifestyles. They would rightly like more healthy options at lunchtimes and are taking this up through the school council.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	4
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

## How effective is the provision?

Teachers are enthusiastic and lessons are generally characterised by good relationships between staff and pupils. Staff know pupils very well. However, sometimes too much reliance is placed upon the individual views of teachers, rather than lesson plans and evaluation, to measure how well pupils are doing in lessons or over a longer period. Teachers plan interesting activities but there is sometimes an over-emphasis on lessons which will keep pupils involved, without a sound underpinning of what they need to learn. Teaching assistants work well with pupils individually but are under-used in some whole-class sessions. Teachers have responded positively to an area for improvement raised at the last inspection, which was to improve the quality and consistency of marking. Comments are now helpful and informative but sometimes of questionable value for the pupils who say, 'I can't read what that says, ask my teacher, she wrote it!'

Since the last inspection, the school has taken some positive steps to provide a more creative curriculum and in many respects has been effective in providing this. The move to a topic- or theme-based approach to delivering different subjects has made them more accessible to pupils. The senior leadership team is rightly ambitious for the curriculum to be even more creative and to present all learning as exciting and meaningful. Recent initiatives such as the literacy competitions have been positive steps in the in school's drive to engage all pupils and raise attainment.

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Pupils' care and welfare are given a high priority, as shown by the recent training for positive handling strategies which was attended by all staff who work at the school. The headteacher has taken effective action to address some concerns expressed by staff and parents about site security. Good links with outside agencies, including health, social care and the police, mean that there is a wide range of support available for pupils and their families. The school has strong evidence to show that this has a significant impact upon the future life-chances of many of its pupils. Where appropriate, pupils are prepared well for a move to a mainstream school.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

It is clear that the school's leaders and managers are strongly committed to creating an equality of opportunity and improving the life-chances of its pupils. In this they have been successful in changing many pupils' attitudes to school but not sufficiently challenging with regard to expectations of attainment and progress. Processes and systems for evaluating the work of the school have been put in place. However, a lack of rigour means that some key aspects have not been considered sufficiently closely. Arrangements for safeguarding have been updated and are now more secure. The governing body is aware that systems for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the school's work have not been as robust as they would wish. Nevertheless, governors have done well to manage and minimise a budget deficit and they are justifiably positive about the future impact of this. They are also rightly determined to maintain the commitment to staff's professional development which is reflected in the school's Investor in People award.

The school has been successful in raising its standing in both the local and the wider community. It has links as far afield as Tanzania which it uses to good effect to introduce the pupils to other ways of life. Staff are aware of the difficulties faced by parents or carers who may live some distance away, and use a variety of means, including regular telephone calls, to keep them in touch. One parent said of staff, 'They are approachable if a problem arises.' The school makes good use of the partnerships that have been established to guide pupils and support their families. The school has good evidence to show that the work of the outreach team is also greatly appreciated by other partners.

The newly appointed headteacher and the deputy headteacher have a clear vision for the school's future; all concerned recognise that there is more work to be done if this vision is to be realised.

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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## **Views of parents and carers**

Almost all parents and carers who returned questionnaires were very positive about the school and the support provided for them and their children. Any concerns expressed in the questionnaires were considered carefully by the inspector with the school, although not attributed. Overall, the comment 'I think it's the best thing that has happened to my son' echoes the views of the vast majority and reflects the good level of partnership working that exists between the school and families.



## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Vermont School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received nine completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 26 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	6	60	3	30	0	0	1	10
The school keeps my child safe	8	80	1	10	1	10	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	8	80	0	0	0	0	1	10
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	90	0	0	0	0	1	10
The teaching is good at this school	9	90	0	0	1	10	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	8	80	1	10	0	0	1	10
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	6	60	3	30	1	10	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	8	80	1	10	1	10	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	90	0	0	0	0	1	10
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	90	0	0	0	0	1	10
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	80	1	10	1	10	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	9	90	0	0	0	0	1	10
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	9	90	0	0	0	0	1	10

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.

**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.**



28 January 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Vermont School, Southampton SO16 7LT**

Thank you for helping me to learn about your school. I really enjoyed my visit. It was good to meet you all and to see how well you are doing. I am writing this letter to tell you what I found.

Vermont is a satisfactory school which guides and cares for you well. You seem to enjoy school much more than you have done before and I could see that you are working hard to improve your behaviour. There are plenty of interesting things for you to do both in and out of school. It was good to see how much you enjoy using the spaces you have to play and work in, but not all areas of your school are as good for working in as others. I have asked your headteacher to look at how the school could be made to look better and to be more comfortable for you. Perhaps you could help him with your ideas.

Your headteacher and all the staff work hard to help you. It is important that everyone helps you to learn as much as possible, as well as making sure you are safe and active. I have asked the teachers to look at the way they plan their lessons and keep records so that everyone, including you, can see clearly how well you are doing. I have also asked all the staff to make sure you all learn as much as you can in lessons and to help you to understand how you can do this.

Your headteacher and the governors are going to work with everyone to keep an even closer eye on how well the school is doing. I am sure that you will all try your best to help them.

Yours faithfully

Anne Duffy Her Majesty's Inspector

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