

Valley School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106168
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	355898
Inspection dates	16–17 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Hilary Ward

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	73
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Hilton
Headteacher	Mrs Cath Goodlet
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed 12 lessons and saw the work of 11 teachers. They had meetings with school leaders and other staff, representatives of the governing body and multi-disciplinary support professionals. They observed various aspects of the school's work and reviewed documentation relating to safeguarding, to school development planning and to the progress, welfare and care of pupils. The inspectors reviewed 32 parents and carers' questionnaires and staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively teachers are using assessment to plan for the diverse learning needs of pupils.
- The impact of the curriculum in raising standards for all groups of pupils.
- The effectiveness of partnerships with parents and carers and multi-disciplinary support professionals in meeting individual needs and planning for pupils' futures.

Information about the school

Valley School is a larger-than-average size special school for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, and with autism spectrum conditions. The Nursery has 20 mainstream places and a further six for children identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The majority of the children attending will move on to alternative mainstream provision for their Reception Year. Children identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities prior to admission to the Nursery are assessed during their time there. Pupils in the main school all have a statement of special educational needs. There are more boys than girls attending the school. Pupils are drawn from across the Borough of Stockport. The proportion of pupils from minority-ethnic groups is around the national average. All pupils in the main school have significant communication difficulties relating to their special educational needs and/or disabilities and the school is a leader in communication, offering training in the region.

The school has Healthy School status and has received the Sportsmark and Activemark awards. Extended school provision is offered and managed separately but makes use of the school's facilities. Since the last inspection, building work has been undertaken to improve accommodation for the increasing number of pupils on the autism spectrum.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Valley is an exceptional special school which has continued to build on its reputation and on previous inspection findings as an outstandingly effective provider. The individual care and support to meet pupils' often extremely complex needs is outstanding. As a result of the good teaching and excellent care, pupils make at least good and sometimes outstanding progress in their learning and personal development. The school motto of 'small steps, giant strides' perfectly describes the attention to detail the school recognises is so important to ensure its pupils thrive. The safety and health of pupils is paramount.

Pupils experience a wide range of activities on offer in the excellent curriculum, both in school and in the community, which contribute to their all-round development. They clearly enjoy their time in school from their welcome by the headteacher at the door in the morning until they leave. A parent of one pupil captured this well by saying, 'He always comes home with a smile on his face.' Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Behaviour is excellent, supported by the establishment and implementation of clear behaviour management strategies for those pupils who can present challenge. Pupils develop an excellent understanding of how to contribute to the school and wider community. High-quality information is shared between school staff, specialist staff and parents and carers to ensure pupils' complex needs are met consistently. This is much appreciated by parents and carers, many of whom said they feel very supported by the school. Parents of children who attend the Nursery recognise the learning and development opportunities offered by the outstanding provision made in the fully-inclusive setting.

Senior managers have very high expectations for the pupils, although, in some sessions, the use of assessment does not always inform progression to specific learning outcomes for individuals. Leaders closely monitor the school's work, which has enabled them to self-evaluate very effectively and see clearly which aspects they would like to improve even further. These are communicated effectively to staff, the multi-disciplinary teams and to the governing body who provide good and effective support. The school is a happy place to work and learn. A range of extremely effective partnerships has been developed with other schools and with external agencies to support pupils' learning and their understanding of the community in which they live. As a result promotion of community cohesion is outstanding.

As a result of leaders' shared commitment and vision, evident in the way they continue to sustain outstanding effectiveness, the school demonstrates an outstanding capacity to continue to improve.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By September 2011, improve pupil progress in lessons even further by ensuring that:
 - teachers make consistent use of assessment information to determine specific learning outcomes for individuals
 - teachers consistently make full and productive use of all parts of the lesson for all pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

In an extremely safe and supportive setting, where routines are well understood to provide a supportive framework, pupils flourish and enjoy the learning experiences they gain in lessons. Detailed records of pupils' progress show that all groups and individuals make at least good, and that some make outstanding, gains in their learning and their personal development, taking into account their extremely low starting points and the significant barriers to their learning. Pupils acquire the social and independence skills that will help them in the future because of strong and trusting relationships with staff who know them well. They learn to express their basic needs and wishes via a range of strategies such as sign, symbols, including a symbolic communication system, real objects and photographs. A few higher-attaining pupils learn to read and write simple words and to use some basic functional numeracy. In a lesson for pupils on the autism spectrum, pupils learnt the importance of having to exchange money for goods. Pupils are given the opportunity to practise such skills in the community.

In spite of their widely varying physical abilities, all pupils participate in an excellent range of sporting activities, some of which are designed to meet their therapy needs, for example, rebound therapy. Many others love the freedom of being able to run and play in the safe school grounds and develop independent physical skills on the available equipment both in the playground and in physical education lessons. Pupils learn to make healthy food choices taking into account their specific individual health needs and, sometimes, self-limiting diets. It is inevitable that the health conditions and medical needs of a few children impacts on their attendance, but the close relationship the school has with their families supports them back into school.

Pupils proudly contribute to life in the school community by taking on responsibilities relevant to their interests and abilities. They raise funds for different charities and participate in events in the local and wider community, for example, in an inter-school science fair and at a concert at The Bridgewater Hall. They learn to be supportive and tolerant of each other and gain a strong understanding of other cultures and of the wider world through visits and religious celebrations. Older pupils participate in a residential week when even some of the most vulnerable pupils are supported to attend. At the end of each day pupils and staff share a time of reflection on the day, providing strong support for pupils' social and spiritual development.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

The exceptionally high quality of care and a curriculum which is well-adapted to the widely differing needs of the pupils are central to the school's success. Staff at all levels and the multi-disciplinary professionals who provide specialist expertise, such as therapists, nurse, and dietician, all show a very strong commitment to pupils' personal development and their well-being. The school has a stable and highly-experienced staff who continue to develop their knowledge and skills to meet the changing and increasingly complex needs of the pupils.

Teaching is at least good and sometimes it is outstanding. On a few occasions time is not used effectively when pupils wait for their turn in group sessions. Progress is best in lessons where teachers communicate very clearly what they want each child to achieve and effectively assess the progress they have made so that they can plan their next steps. However, this exceptionally careful assessment is not always consistently used to plan precisely for individuals' future learning. A strong feature is the teamwork. Teaching assistants take the initiative, for example, recognising when a pupil needs time out of the classroom, and this is undertaken with minimal disruption. The development of social and communication skills is recognised as underpinning pupil progress, but teachers do not

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always plan the objectives for individuals in sessions such as snack time, which form part of the teaching day.

Considerable thought has been given to making the curriculum relevant and exciting. The decision has been made to offer the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum to all pupils up to the end of Key Stage 1 and this is highly effective in meeting their complex learning needs. The curriculum offers outstanding opportunities to engage pupils in a range of activities, for example, through a multi-sensory story of a snowman, where pupils with profound learning difficulties tried on different warm clothes, felt ice cubes and moved to music. The school has even introduced a modern foreign language to help pupils to understand other cultures, and some pupils with autism have learned some French words. A range of after school activities, which are very well planned to meet pupils' needs, are offered and managed by an external provider in collaboration with school staff. Even though the curriculum is already meeting needs exceptionally well, the school has further plans to develop the creative curriculum and move to a more topic-based approach to enhance it even further.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school's high level of effectiveness is largely a result of the aspirational leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher. They constructively support their staff to continually improve the high-quality learning environment through rigorous and effective self-assessment. Staff are proud to work at the school and morale is high. Several parents and carers commented that, 'leadership is a strength'. They are very appreciative of the excellent partnership they feel they have with the school and its specialist professionals and of the sharing of information about their children's progress and well-being. Members of the governing body support and challenge the school well and have recently become linked to classes to better inform themselves about the impact of the provision. They ensure that safeguarding policy and procedures are extremely robust, and support the school to promote equality and diversity exceptionally well.

Partnerships with external agencies support pupils' care and welfare outstandingly well. Partnership arrangements to support pupils' learning, for example, with local schools and the local community, are excellent and allow pupils to practise the skills they learn in a variety of inclusive settings and to develop an understanding of the wider world. These elements also contribute strongly to the school's outstanding promotion of community cohesion. The school itself is a highly-cohesive community.

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As a member of Greater Manchester Challenge, the school is able to moderate and benchmark pupil progress and to share skills and expertise. The skills they have developed in communication have resulted in the school offering professional development to other schools in the region. The increasingly effective analysis of data about pupil progress has enabled leaders to identify groups of pupils who may need additional support in aspects of their learning. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are highly effective in monitoring teaching and learning and have already identified where further improvements can be made.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of education and care in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities have a formal assessment during their time in the Nursery. Individual programmes are prepared for them in collaboration with parents and carers and with specialist professionals to focus on priority areas of development. As a result they make at least good and often outstanding progress from their starting points and some move on to other, less specialist, placements. Those who stay at Valley School for their Reception Year enjoy the high-quality Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum which is offered in the mixed-age classes up to the age of seven.

The fully inclusive environment of the Nursery provides children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities with a rich communication and social environment. All children across the Early Years Foundation Stage benefit from the highly-skilled staff and the creative curriculum which is offered. Mainstream children were seen to be very supportive and caring of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Achievements are continually assessed and recorded using appropriate small-step

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assessments for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and 'My Learning Journey' for the mainstream children. Teachers use this detailed knowledge to match exciting and challenging activities to the abilities and needs of the diverse range of the children. Teachers have high expectations for the children as a result of which mainstream children in the nursery make good and often outstanding progress against their early learning goals. They are very well prepared to move on to their mainstream schools when they complete their year in Valley nursery.

The stimulating learning environment supports a range of activities in the curriculum both indoors and outdoors and there is an excellent balance of adult led and child led activities. In one visit to the nursery, some children were very busy being 'wriggly worms', others were outside selecting and sorting clothes for different weather conditions whilst yet another group were giving their news. The Early Years Foundation Stage is monitored and evaluated very well by senior staff.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Almost half of parents and carers returned questionnaires. They all expressed a high level of confidence in the care their children receive and an appreciation of the progress they make in their learning and independence skills. A few parents and carers of children in the nursery have not yet had the opportunity for a formal review meeting and expressed a wish for more information in order to support their child's learning at home. However, they also acknowledged the response the nursery staff had made by putting up a whiteboard with information for parents about the topics being covered. Many parents added comments on their questionnaires which were extremely positive. Examples included: 'Valley is an exceptional school...I can't thank them enough.' 'The school has had a life changing effect on my child...I cannot praise the staff highly enough'; 'Everything about the teaching and management of the school is outstanding.' The inspection findings endorse the positive views expressed.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Valley 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 inspection team received 32 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 73 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	29	91	3	9	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	84	5	16	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	21	66	9	28	2	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	63	11	34	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	25	78	7	22	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	63	8	25	3	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	66	10	31	1	3	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)	15	47	10	31	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	72	8	25	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	63	12	38	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	63	11	34	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	28	88	4	13	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	78	7	22	0	0	0	0

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).

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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



18 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Valley School, Stockport, SK7 1EN

You may remember that recently two inspectors came to visit your school. We came into some of your lessons and watched you in the playground, at lunch and snack times, learning in different situations. We especially enjoyed watching a very active and exuberant physical education lesson in the hall.

It was obvious that you enjoy school very much and that staff make you feel safe, well cared for and happy. Your school is outstanding. We particularly found that.

- You make at least good and sometimes excellent progress in all areas of your learning.
- The curriculum provides exciting opportunities to learn new things.
- Staff help you to learn to manage your behaviour exceptionally well.
- Staff work exceptionally well as teams to ensure you get all the specialist help you need.
- Your parents and carers are very happy with the care and education the school provides for you and the help it gives to them.

The headteacher and staff have very clear ideas about how they want to keep improving things for you. We have asked them to think about.

- Making even better use of assessment to ensure that teachers and teaching assistants know exactly what they want each of you to learn every lesson.
- Making sure all of you are taking part as much as possible throughout a lesson.

Thank you again for making us so welcome.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Ward

Lead inspector

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