

# The Valley School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117669
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	379451
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 November 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Declan McCarthy

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 special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	142
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	4
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jacqui Joyce
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Harrison
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 February 2009
<b>School address</b>	Valley Way Stevenage SG2 9AB
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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	14–15 November 2011
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They jointly observed 12 lessons, taught by 11 teachers, with the headteacher or the assistant headteacher or a senior teacher. Meetings were held with a small group of students, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation including: minutes of governing body meetings; the school development plan; policies to promote safeguarding; attainment and progress tracking data, and samples of students' work. Inspectors scrutinised inspection questionnaires returned by staff, students and 11 parents and carers. They also took account of the concerns raised by a very few parents and carers through the inspection service provider.

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

- How well are different groups of pupils achieving over time and are there any differences in the quality of their learning in lessons?
- How consistently are teachers using assessment information to match work to different abilities and aptitudes, and to extend the learning of all students?
- What impact are middle leaders having on improving achievement and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?
- How effectively is the pilot scheme for sixth-form provision being implemented?

## Information about the school

The school caters for students with moderate learning difficulties. The majority have additional difficulties including autism, speech and language needs and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. All students have a statement of special educational needs and the vast majority are White British. Of those who are from ethnic minority heritages, a few speak English as an additional language. Students are admitted from a wide area of the county and a very small number are looked after by the local authority. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained its Investors in People standard and the Football Association Charter and Sports Mark awards. The leadership and senior management teams have been extended, and there have been changes to the governing body during the past year. The roll has fallen and a greater proportion of students are now entering the school with additional special educational needs and/or disabilities. A new pilot sixth form was established in September 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

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils and is steadily improving. This is reflected in the improvements made in the care, guidance and support for students since the last inspection and this aspect has moved from satisfactory to good as a result. Students' behaviour is good and they say they feel safe in school. There are satisfactory procedures to ensure their safety and well-being. The great majority of students enjoy school and most parents and carers are happy with its work, as reflected in the views of one respondent who wrote, 'My son is happy and making good progress.'

Students' attainment on entry is low due to the complexity of their special educational needs. Learning and progress as seen in lessons and reflected in the school's data are satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress towards their examination courses. Although the range of examination courses has increased since the last inspection, there are insufficient higher-level courses to suit the needs of some more-able students. A new system of assessment has been implemented since the last inspection which has led to improvements in lesson planning. However, while lesson plans now include detailed information about students' prior attainment, they do not always contribute sufficiently to improving learning. This is because the assessment information is not always used to match tasks to the learning needs of different groups of students. Furthermore, although students are given clear targets, these are not always sufficiently challenging to extend the learning of all students. The use of assessment is therefore satisfactory. Students in the new sixth form are achieving satisfactorily as a result of a satisfactory curriculum and satisfactory use of assessment, neither of which are yet fully in place. The curriculum is satisfactory overall and provides good opportunities for enriching learning through good sports partnerships with other schools. As a result, students exercise vigorously and have a good understanding of how to stay healthy. This demonstrates the continuing positive impact of the Football Association Charter and Sports Mark awards. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall.

The school has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development, based on satisfactory monitoring of teaching and learning by senior leaders who use the outcomes of this to set clear priorities for development. However the role of middle leaders is under-developed. They do not use whole-school data or the outcomes of monitoring systematically enough to improve achievement in their subjects. Governance and leadership are satisfactory. Taken together with the weaknesses that still remain, the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

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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?**

- Use assessment more rigorously to improve achievement by:
  - ensuring that all students are set sufficiently challenging targets
  - consistently using the information on students' prior attainment to match learning tasks more precisely to their needs
  - increase the opportunities for more-able students to take challenging examination courses, including at GCSE level.
- Strengthen leadership and management by developing the monitoring role of middle leaders so that they use performance data and the outcomes of their monitoring of teaching and learning more effectively to improve achievement in their subjects.
- Ensure that the plans for developing the curriculum and assessment systems in the sixth form are fully implemented by July 2012.

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

Students' achievement throughout the school and in the new sixth form is satisfactory. In lessons, learning is satisfactory and students make satisfactory progress. Their good behaviour in lessons facilitates learning as students focus on tasks, listen to their teachers and follow instructions carefully. Despite these good features progress in most lessons is often only satisfactory because tasks are not always matched sufficiently well to students' levels of ability. Consequently, some students find these too difficult and others too easy. In some lessons, though, students make outstanding progress and gain new knowledge and skills rapidly. This is because students thoroughly enjoy the tasks as their learning is consistently challenged through the excellent use of questioning. Students make satisfactory progress in their examination courses. However, a few of the most-able pupils are not achieving as well they could because there are not enough examination courses available to suit their abilities. New BTEC courses, though, for example, in physical education and science, have been introduced since the previous inspection. These are highly relevant to students' needs and enable more students than previously to gain accreditation. Students with additional needs and the very few at an early stage of learning English also make satisfactory progress. There are no significant differences in the achievement of boys and girls. Students make satisfactory progress towards their personal targets but the school rightly recognises that these must be more challenging to move learning forward at more rapid pace.

Students make a good contribution to the community in various ways. The school

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council is active and older students often help the younger ones in their activities. Students work as junior sports leaders in a local primary special school and take part in a variety of fund-raising activities. Their self-confidence improves well as they move through the school and their relationships with others are good. Most students develop a good understanding of right from wrong and appreciate the diversity of cultural traditions. Students have a good understanding of staying healthy, for example, by making healthy choices and drinking water during the day instead of fizzy drinks. Their broadly-average attendance, their adequate preparation for the world of work and satisfactory achievement ensure they are satisfactorily prepared for the next stage of their lives. This is reflected in nearly all students who left school at the end of last term entering education and/or employment.

*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>	*
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>2</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>	3
<b>The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Teaching is mainly satisfactory, but some is good and some outstanding. Where teaching is outstanding, a wide range of well-chosen resources and activities are used to promote learning. In these lessons, assessment information is always very well used to match tasks precisely to individuals’ different learning needs. Support assistants work seamlessly with the teacher to support learning and clarify students’ misunderstandings. However, this quality is not typical of the majority of teaching. This is due to

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

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weaknesses in the use of assessment information to underpin suitably challenging activities and targets set in lessons and on students’ marked work.

The curriculum is relevant to the needs of students and a wider range of examination courses is now available since the last inspection. However, some of the most-able students have a limited range of higher-level examination courses to choose from. A good range of lunchtime activities is provided which are popular with students and contribute significantly to their enjoyment of school. A good partnership with a local sports academy enables students to use the all-weather turf on a daily basis. There is an appropriate emphasis on developing basic key skills and on personal, social and health education. Opportunities for work related learning are satisfactory, supported by good links between the school and the Connexions service.

The school provides good quality care for its students. Support for those students and their families whose circumstances might make them vulnerable is good, and has a positive impact on their well-being. Arrangements for transition in and out of the school are good, and strong links with outside agencies further promote the health and well-being of pupils.

*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?

Satisfactory leadership has underpinned the satisfactory development of a shared vision for the school and a common drive for improvement. The monitoring of teaching and learning by senior leaders has improved and has led to effective action towards school improvement. Inadequate teaching has been eliminated and there is a steady rise in the proportion of good or better lessons. Learning and progress are improving as a result. Although a few subject leaders have monitored teaching and learning, however, the outcomes have not been put to best use. Their roles as middle managers are not fully developed. The information gained from progress data and the outcomes of monitoring is not used to improve performance in their subjects. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body provides good support for the school. It ensures statutory requirements are met, particularly in relation to safeguarding procedures and the duty to promote community cohesion, both of which are satisfactory. However, although members visit the school regularly to form their own view of its work, the governing body has not focused sharply enough on the progress the school is making in its identified areas for improvement. Good partnerships with outside agencies promote students’ wellbeing effectively. The

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school tackles discrimination appropriately. However, its promotion of equality of opportunity is only satisfactory because some more-able students do not learn as much as they could. There are good systems in place for ensuring that students' welfare is protected. These meet and sometimes exceed national and local authority guidance. Links with parents and carers are satisfactory. A high proportion attend annual review meetings and are engaged in the life of the school, such as in the consultation for the proposed development of the new sixth form. The school uses its resources appropriately to ensure satisfactory value for money.

*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>3</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>

## Sixth form

The sixth form provides a satisfactory education for its students. Satisfactory teaching and use of assessment in lessons enables students to make satisfactory progress. The curriculum is satisfactory. It has an appropriately strong emphasis on the promotion of functional skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, together with independence skills and work related learning. Students have adequate opportunities to follow accredited courses, such as the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network Bronze and Silver awards and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Plans are in place to widen opportunities for accreditation and to further refine assessment as the sixth form becomes more established. Students receive good pastoral care and guidance, through, for example, good links with the Connexions service which supports arrangements for work related learning. Their behaviour and relationships with others are good. Satisfactory leadership has ensured that a clear plan for developing the curriculum and assessment is in place, although, given the short period of time the sixth form has been running, this is not yet fully implemented.



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*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	3
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

## Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers expressed mainly positive views in the relatively low return of completed questionnaires (8% of the total sent out). One questionnaire return is equivalent to 9% of the total: consequently, the figures are not statistically reliable. Nevertheless, most respondents indicate that their children enjoy school and are making enough progress. Most are happy with their children’s experience at school. Inspection findings confirm parents’ and carers’ views in these respects. A few respondents raised concerns about the management of behaviour, the safety and well-being of their children and how well their children were prepared for the future. These concerns were investigated through analysis of documents, observations and discussions. Inspection findings judged behaviour and its management to be good, and safeguarding procedures and the preparation of students for their future well-being as satisfactory.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The 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 11 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 142 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	7	64	3	27	0	0	1	9
The school keeps my child safe	6	55	3	27	0	0	2	18
The school informs me about my child’s progress	6	55	2	18	1	9	2	18
My child is making enough progress at this school	4	36	4	36	1	9	2	18
The teaching is good at this school	5	45	4	36	1	9	1	9
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	4	36	4	36	1	9	2	18
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	3	27	5	45	2	18	1	9
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)	3	27	5	45	1	9	2	18
The school meets my child’s particular needs	3	27	6	55	0	0	2	18
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	5	45	1	9	1	9	2	18
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	36	2	18	1	9	3	27
The school is led and managed effectively	4	36	4	36	0	0	2	18
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	6	55	2	18	0	0	2	18

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.**



16 November 2011

Dear Students

### **Inspection of The Valley School, Stevenage SG2 9AB**

Thank you for making us welcome when we came to your school recently. Thank you, also, for telling us about your school. We were particularly impressed with your good behaviour and the way you were working so hard in lessons. We liked seeing how many of you were enjoying using the all-weather turf, playing musical instruments and using computers at lunchtime. We agree that you have a good range of activities which you enjoy. We found that The Valley is a satisfactory school. You are making satisfactory progress because teaching is satisfactory. You told us that you feel safe and most of your parents agree. The school provides good care, support and guidance to ensure your well-being. The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The new sixth form is in the early stages of development and is satisfactory. We have asked the school to do three things to improve. These are to:

- ensure that staff use their knowledge about how well you are doing to give you tasks in lessons which suit each of you, that you can achieve, and that help you learn as much as possible
- make sure that those teachers with responsibility for leading subjects always check how good teaching is and how well the information about what you can do is used to help you learn
- implement all the plans for developing the sixth form by July 2012.

Keep trying your best and thank you again for speaking to us.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCarthy  
Lead inspector

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