

Valley Gardens Middle School

Valley Gardens , Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear, NE25 9AQ

Inspection dates 25–26 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students receive an outstanding education at Valley Gardens Middle School. This includes their personal development as well as their academic achievement.
- Equality of opportunity is excellent. All groups of students make outstanding progress from their starting points. By the time students leave at the end of Year 8 attainment is significantly above that found nationally. Attainment in mathematics, one of the school's specialist subjects, is particularly impressive.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers have high expectations and many lessons are innovative in their approach. Students say their teachers make learning fun and help them to do well. In a few lessons, however, learning and progress are not maximised, as teachers do not give students clear criteria for success or sufficient opportunities for them to reflect on how well they are learning.
- Teaching assistants provide excellent support for students who are disabled or who have special educational needs. This ensures that they make outstanding progress.
- Students' work is marked well and they are given very helpful advice on how to improve their work. There are some good examples of students responding to this advice.
- Students' behaviour is excellent and the mature way in which they work and cooperate in lessons plays a major part in their successful learning. Students feel very safe and they promote safety well for others.
- Leadership and management of the school, including governance, are outstanding. Leaders set themselves very high standards and respond extremely quickly to any apparent relative weakness, ensuring that the achievement of students and the quality of teaching are optimised. Those leaders in charge of subjects are fully involved in assuring the quality of learning and progress in their subject areas.
- Students experience a vast array of learning experiences that contribute extremely well to their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students are very appreciative of those opportunities and enjoy them immensely. They acquire skills that prepare them extremely well for the next stage in their education.
- Staff and students are very proud of their school and enjoy being there. Comments such as 'it's a really pleasant place to be', from a student, and 'a wonderful place to work and learn', from a member of staff, illustrate this well.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 33 lessons, taught by 30 teachers. Two observations were conducted jointly, one with the headteacher and the other with the deputy headteacher.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection, development planning, the monitoring of the quality of teaching and also information about teachers’ professional development.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team and a group of leaders in charge of subjects. A meeting was held with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body.
- The inspectors spoke to many students in lessons, at breaks and at lunchtimes. They also spoke formally to two groups of students on the first day of the inspection.
- A meeting and a telephone discussion were held with representatives from the local authority.
- The 38 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the 46 responses to the staff questionnaire were analysed.

Inspection team

Alison Thomson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Graeme Clarke	Additional Inspector
Shirley Fall	Additional Inspector
Patrick Feerick	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized school of this type.
- Almost all students are White British and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is much lower than average. (This is funding available for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, pupils in local authority care and those whose parents are in the armed forces.) The pupil premium group in the school is the group known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students supported by school action is well below average and the proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is lower than average.
- The school meets the current government floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- The school has specialist status in English, mathematics and science.
- The school has specially resourced provision for students who have moderate learning difficulties.
- The school has gained many awards, including the International Award for teaching young people about the world around them and celebrating difference.
- Separate childcare provision shares the school site. This is not managed by the governing body and was not included in this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Maximise learning and progress in all lessons by:
 - always giving clear criteria for students to understand if they are being successful in their learning
 - building in sufficient opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and check their work for accuracy.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students start in Year 5 with attainment that is varied but generally a little above average. Excellent induction procedures and liaison with the first schools help them to settle quickly and get a very confident start. Progress throughout the school is outstanding. By the end of Year 8 students' attainment is consistently well above that found nationally, including that in English. Attainment in mathematics, one of the school's specialisms, is exceptionally high.
- Students who are disabled or who have special educational needs make outstanding progress. This includes those pupils who attend the specially resourced provision. Those students are integrated into mainstream provision wherever possible and are assisted in their learning by teaching assistants.
- The very few students who are eligible for free school meals funding make excellent progress in all areas, including English and mathematics, and there are minimal gaps between their attainment and that of other groups in the school. This reflects the school's commitment to equality of opportunity. Funding is used to provide additional support by a dedicated teacher and by teaching assistants and any relative underachievement is addressed well.
- The school's current data indicate that progress and attainment in all subjects are rising even further this year.
- Outstanding achievement was seen during the inspection in many subject areas and in all years from Year 5 to Year 8. Students' achievement was best when they worked collaboratively to solve problems, for example in a Year 7 lesson on the Fibonacci sequence.
- The school prepares students extremely well for the next stage in their education. Their literacy, numeracy and communication skills are very well developed. Literacy is given a high priority in all lessons and students clearly enjoy reading. This was verified during the inspection by listening to some Year 5 students read.
- Students' achievement is continually improving because of outstanding leadership and management, continually improving teaching and the rigorous checks that are made on students' progress.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Much teaching is outstanding and it is rarely less than good. Teachers are enthusiastic and make learning enjoyable for the students. This was exemplified in many lessons, such as Year 7 French where students made outstanding progress as they competitively named the countries whose flags disappeared from the interactive whiteboard display.
- Challenge is a feature of many lessons and students relish this. In a Year 5 science lesson students made outstanding progress as they enthusiastically carried out investigations to prove the hypothesis that sound travels by vibrations.
- Students gain in confidence as teachers give them opportunities to discuss ideas and to work together. In a Year 7 English lesson students were observed confidently performing dialogues in modern English and Tudor language in front of the whole class.
- Teaching assistants very effectively support students who are disabled or who have special educational needs by carefully adapting the work and by questioning the students expertly to check their understanding.
- Many lessons develop the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well, such as empathising with victims of crime or understanding important events in Buddhism.
- There are, however, a few lessons in which teachers do not capitalise well enough on the enthusiasm of the students to be involved in their own learning. They do not give students sufficiently clear criteria for success to enable them to tell how well they are learning, or enough opportunities for them to reflect on their learning or check their work for themselves. In those

lessons progress is not as good as it could be.

- Excellent examples of marking in books were seen in all subject areas. There are many helpful comments to help students improve their work and some instances of students responding to those comments.
- The responses to Parent View revealed that most parents agree that their children are taught well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of the large majority of students is exemplary and 'has always been so', reported one long-serving member of the governing body. This view is echoed by staff and parents and was evident throughout the inspection.
- Students are reflective and set themselves very high standards. They rate behaviour highly but say there is always room for improvement.
- Students' outstanding behaviour has a highly positive impact on their learning. Many instances were seen of cooperative learning, with small-group discussion being a prelude to whole-class debates.
- There are many opportunities for students to take on responsibilities, such as the school council promoting the views of others and sports leaders organising sports for younger pupils. The sports leaders were observed helping to run sports day very efficiently during the inspection.
- Students say that they feel extremely safe at school. Staff and parents strongly agree that the school keeps its students safe. Students have a very keen awareness of the different forms that bullying can take and say people rarely fall out. If they do, it is 'minor silliness' and gets sorted out very quickly by themselves or by staff.
- Students promote safety for others well, such as producing posters on how to keep safe in technology lessons and guidance on using computers safely.
- Attendance of all groups of students is consistently above average.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Leadership and management, including governance, are highly effective and have brought about many improvements, including the students' achievement and the quality of teaching.
- The headteacher, ably assisted by the senior leadership team, delegates well and those leaders in charge of subjects play a vital role in making checks on learning and teaching in their areas.
- The staff questionnaires showed that members of staff feel extremely valued, are proud to work at the school and that there is strong support for the work that is being done there.
- The school knows its strengths and areas for development very well. It monitors and evaluates the progress of the pupils rigorously and any underachievement is addressed quickly and effectively. Consequently, attainment and progress have improved strongly.
- The quality of teaching has improved through lesson observations and training. All teachers spoken to knew exactly what aspects of their teaching had required attention to make it even better.
- Equality of opportunity is outstanding, with all groups of students making outstanding progress. Every student is known individually and nurtured extremely well. Gaps between the performance of different groups of students have been minimal for a number of years.
- The curriculum meets the needs and interests of all students extremely well. It is enriched by an impressive range of clubs, trips and residential visits which provide further opportunities for students to gain in confidence and broaden their social skills and cultural experiences. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is further promoted by the high expectations of all members of staff, who are very positive role models for them.
- The school's safeguarding meets statutory requirements.
- The local authority provides very effective support and has helped the school improve

achievement and the quality of teaching.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors work closely with the school and there is no doubt that they have helped the school to improve. Governors are frequent visitors and have a good knowledge of the quality of teaching. They are well trained, understand the data relating to students' progress and hold the school to account well. Governors are fully involved with the allocation of the school's budget, including the funding for students eligible for the pupil premium and teachers' pay linked to their performance. Governors told the inspectors that they thoroughly enjoyed their work and found it very rewarding.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	108636
Local authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	412370

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	728
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Grayson
Headteacher	Michael Homer
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2009
Telephone number	0191 200 8792
Fax number	0191 200 8785
Email address	valleygardensmiddle@northtyneside.gov.uk

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