

Vallis First School

Milk Street, Frome, Somerset, BA11 3DB

Inspection dates

16–17 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The skilful leadership of the headteacher, with very effective support from other senior leaders and governors, is a great asset to the school. Their shared vision to ensure that each pupil achieves well successfully underpins all aspects of their work.
- Systems for monitoring and checking the school's work and pupils' progress are thorough and rigorous. Development planning is very effective. The rate of improvement accelerated well last year. The school is very well placed to improve further.
- Overall achievement is good. Throughout the school pupils' achievement in reading is excellent. By Year 4, attainment in reading is above that expected for this age. Attainment in writing and mathematics is in line with what is expected.
- Reception children get off to a good start, especially in reading, and the majority of them reach the level of development expected for their age by Year 1.
- Supported by excellent relationships between adults and pupils, teaching is uniformly at least good. Reading is exceptionally well taught.
- The school makes excellent use of additional government funding. As a result, the pupils who receive it achieve exceptionally well. They rapidly catch up with their peers.
- Pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around school is good. They enjoy lessons. By the time they leave pupils are confident and engage well in learning.
- Safeguarding arrangements are very thorough. Pupils feel safe and secure in school. Parents and carers are confident that their children are well looked after.
- Senior leaders and governors employ a comprehensive and thorough programme to help judge teaching quality. This has resulted in an improvement in teaching and achievement across the school.
- Governors are very well informed and carry out their statutory duties effectively. Staff are rigorously held to account regarding their impact on pupils' achievement. Governors' support for helping the school to improve is especially good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- There is not enough outstanding teaching to ensure all pupils' progress is rapid in every class.
- Pupils' attainment in writing and mathematics is not as high as in reading.
- Not all opportunities are taken for advice and best practice to be fully shared as a means of improving teaching further.

Information about this inspection

- All teachers were observed teaching. Some of these observations were with the headteacher.
- Inspectors heard a small sample of pupils reading, scrutinised a sample of pupils' written work and visited the before-school club.
- Meetings were held with pupils, members of the governing body and staff including senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors took account of the 56 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and a small number of parents and carers bringing their children to school were also spoken to.
- Responses from the 25 staff questionnaires were analysed.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a number of documents including the school's records on current pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. Documents relating to planning and monitoring and safeguarding were also looked at.
- Inspectors took into account monitoring reports provided by the school's own commissioned self-evaluation partner.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement for children who are looked after, those eligible for free school meals and the most able pupils. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of support services.

Inspection team

Diane Wilkinson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Robert Arnold	Additional Inspector
Andrew Cotton	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Vallis First School is similar in size to an average-sized primary school. Most pupils are taught in mixed-age classes.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is 17%, which is similar to that found in most schools. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language, is below average. A large minority of these pupils join or leave the school between Reception and Year 4.
- A very small minority of pupils are of Traveller heritage.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average. This is additional government funding to provide extra support for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after.
- The headteacher is a local leader of education (LLE). Vallis is a member of the Frome Community Learning Partnership and staff work closely with other local schools in monitoring and development work.
- The headteacher is part of a team researching provision for looked after children.
- There have been a number of staff changes and some lengthy absences since the previous inspection. This is mainly due to the retirement of long-term members of staff. At the time of the inspection there was an acting deputy headteacher in post.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement further and raise the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - ensuring that the rate of progress pupils make in writing and mathematics is as high as that in reading
 - extending the strategies for supporting middle-attaining pupils to reach the higher stages in national tests
 - increasing the opportunities for teachers to receive coaching and support, especially from outstanding practitioners
 - making sure that marking of pupils' written work indicates clearly what pupils need to do to improve and is followed up by staff to confirm that pupils have addressed the weaknesses.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Under the headteacher's exceptionally strong leadership, teamwork among staff and the governing body is very effective. This ensures a strong and consistent approach to improving the quality of learning for pupils. For example, the focus on mathematics last year was highly effective at improving pupils' progress in the subject.
- Some aspects of senior and subject leadership have been affected by the number of staff changes and long-term absences. The headteacher is supporting new staff exceptionally well in developing their roles.
- The monitoring of and support for improving the quality of teaching by senior leaders and the governing body are very good. Staff, including teaching assistants, benefit from training that is very well tailored to their needs.
- A new initiative for staff to share expertise and monitor the effectiveness of their teaching in mathematics has brought about considerable improvement in pupils' progress. Such opportunities for teachers to receive coaching and support, especially from highly effective colleagues should be increased.
- Pupils' progress is rigorously checked in a wide range of ways. Information from this is very effectively linked to the quality of teaching and learning, through both observation and scrutiny of pupils' work. This provides valuable information about which features enhance progress and where improvement is needed.
- Staff have worked hard to implement the new curriculum and assessment requirements. Features that worked very well in the past have been included and new aspects are being tried out. These are in the very early stages and the full impact on pupils' achievement has yet to be seen. There are still some inconsistencies, especially in the assessment of pupils' written work. Good attention is given to promoting the pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development and in promoting respect and tolerance for each other and for those who are from different traditions.
- The school's membership of the Frome Community Learning Partnership brings positive benefits in external monitoring and development work. Vallis provides strong support to other schools through this route. The headteacher is rightly recognised as an LLE. In this way she provides effective support to local schools, most notably for vulnerable pupils.
- Engagement with parents and carers is a strength because the school readily shares information with them to support pupils' learning. The annual reports of pupils' progress are excellent.
- Safeguarding fully meets requirements. In this aspect the headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body are exceptionally well trained. Consequently child protection procedures, for example, are very thorough.
- Vallis takes full advantage of a range of services offered by the local authority. This, together with the expertise of the headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body, ensures that the support provided for looked after children and those who are disadvantaged is exceptionally good. Local opportunities with other schools to enhance the learning of the most able pupils are exploited effectively to help achieve their good progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have an excellent understanding of their roles and take them very seriously. This ensures that they acquire the skills, for example, to understand progress data well. They are exceptionally skilled at asking for information to help them hold the school to account. This is most notable in the quality of information produced for the management of teachers' performance. Their knowledge of teaching and learning across the school is very good. Consequently governors are extremely well placed to reward only good performance. There is a strong emphasis on maximising funding to provide the very best outcomes for pupils, for example, in reading material. Additional government funding is always considered in individual pupils' best interests. Currently it provides training for teaching assistants, exceptionally well-focused teaching support and a wide variety of personal and educational programmes. Together these promote the pupils' excellent achievement. The sports funding grant encourages participation and a wider range of opportunities both in lessons and in after-school clubs. The latter are very popular and support well-being especially well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Pupils have a very clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong.
- Effective activities to increase pupils' understanding of different cultures and religions foster a strong respect for others. Pupils recognise the ideals and values of Britain today and are well prepared for their

future life in a multicultural society.

- Pupils form very positive relationships with adults and each other. Behaviour in lessons is uniformly good and incidences of low-level disruption are rare. Behaviour around the school and in the playground is very good. During the inspection pupils' movement around the school was exemplary.
- Pupils and their parents and carers report that bullying is rare. Very effective support for pupils who find good behaviour difficult ensures that their behaviour improves well over time.
- Pupils enjoy learning and concentrate well during lessons, listening carefully to what teachers and assistants tell them. Older pupils are keen to discuss their work and respond positively to questioning. A minority of younger pupils lack confidence and need coaxing to respond to adults' questions. Sensitive encouragement ensures that most Year 4 pupils are self-motivating, testing out ideas and discussing methods with each other.
- Pupils enjoy taking on responsibility. The school strongly fosters good relationships and discourages discrimination. As a result, pupils are very caring and supportive of each other. During the inspection this was evident in the way they supported a pupil who was new to the school.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good, including in the very well-run before-school club.
- Pupils are well aware of important ways in which to keep safe. They are especially well informed about how to keep safe when using the internet.
- Attendance levels rose rapidly over last year and are now average. The amount of poor attendance has decreased significantly.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The standard of work in pupils' books and their improving rates of progress show that teaching is typically good. Teaching effectively supports good learning for all pupils, whatever their needs or talents. Activities are well targeted at the stage at which pupils are working and help them to improve.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good overall and is exceptionally so in phonics (letters and the sounds they make). This helps teachers to explain things clearly and use questioning to good effect to ensure pupils understand.
- Excellent relationships with pupils help ensure behaviour management is unobtrusive and very effective.
- Staff are very good at helping pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills in a range of activities. For example, pupils quickly learn how to solve mathematical problems.
- Teaching assistants effectively support learning both in lessons and group work targeted to pupils' needs. Their support for pupils who receive additional funding is especially good.
- Excellent arrangements for specialist teaching for pupils in receipt of additional funding help them to learn exceptionally well. Inspectors observed a very well-adapted writing task for pupils in Years 3 and 4. Targeting these pupils' restricted knowledge of verbs allowed them to participate especially well in a whole-class writing task.
- All teachers are very good at checking how well pupils are doing on a day-to-day basis. Good support is provided to help correct errors and effective advice given on how to improve.
- The marking of written work is not as effective as it should be because it is inconsistent across classes. There is often a lack of advice on how pupils can improve their work. When advice is given there is little evidence to show that it has been followed up.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- When children start in Reception their personal and academic skills are below the levels expected for their age. Good progress, especially in personal and social development and early reading skills, ensures that their attainment is in line with expectations for their age when they enter Year 1.
- There is some variation in the attainment of other year groups because the skills pupils have when they start in Reception differ from year to year. Inspection evidence indicates that most make good progress across the school. The large majority attain the standards expected for nine-year-old pupils in writing and mathematics by the time they leave. Nevertheless, their rates of progress in writing and mathematics still lag behind that in reading.
- Underpinned by the outstanding teaching of phonics in all year groups, progress in reading is excellent. Results in the Year 1 phonics screening checks are consistently above average. By Year 2, pupils'

attainment is above average. Even those pupils who find reading difficult acquire skills very close to those expected at this age.

- Year 4 pupils are confident readers and enjoy reading. As a result of the school's encouragement they read a wide range of texts, which supports their learning well.
- Pupils make good gains in developing writing skills and attain the levels expected for their age by Year 4. They structure their writing appropriately, accurately using punctuation and making good vocabulary choices.
- Mathematics has been a development priority over the past year. This clearly shows in pupils' work which increasingly shows a deep understanding, for example, of place value and both analogue and digital time. By Year 4, pupils' attainment is broadly average. Their learning is improving well this year. Pupils successfully apply their skills in a range of situations and attainment is rising.
- The most able pupils are challenged well and their achievement is good. By Years 3 and 4 they show a strong capacity to push themselves on further; for example, to work with 100,000s in addition tasks. In reading they excel, consistently reaching the stages expected by the end of Year 4. As the rate of progress increases, more pupils working at the levels expected for their age are closing the gap on their higher-attaining classmates. Ensuring they do so is a well-planned priority for the school this year.
- The success of the school's strong commitment to providing equality of opportunity is evident in the excellent achievement of those pupils receiving additional funding. The large majority were a long way behind their classmates at the start of Reception. By the time they leave they are only a term behind their peers in English and mathematics. At the end of Year 2, their standards compare favourably with those of similar pupils nationally.
- Strong support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs enables them to achieve the demanding targets set for them in the younger year groups. In Years 3 and 4 their progress accelerates further and they achieve well.
- The success in improving the attendance of pupils of Traveller heritage helps to ensure they achieve at least as well as their peers.
- Those pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language, achieve well. This is because of the effective support they receive from staff and their classmates.
- School evidence shows that pupils attain high standards in other subjects such as design and technology. For example, the higher attaining pupils won the regional finals in a competition to design a model Formula 1 car. Opportunities to participate in a range of sports activities through the sports grant help pupils to gain new skills.

The early years provision

is good

- The children settle quickly into the early years class and begin to learn straight away. Parents and carers say they really value the range of visits to the school before their children start. They also appreciate the many letters and notes that keep them up to date with their children's progress
- At the time of the inspection, children had only been in school a very short time. Excellent attention to their personal and social development ensured children had settled well. This good start helps them to achieve well, most notably in their personal and social development and important literacy and numeracy skills. Good improvements in children's attainment since the previous inspection give a higher platform for staff to build on in other year groups.
- When they start school, a considerable minority of children have speech and language needs so communication skills are given a high priority. Adults take every opportunity to talk with children, encouraging their confidence and helping children to recognise and extend their learning. This also helps ensure that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are well involved in activities.
- Both teachers and classroom assistants provide activities that support good learning. Careful planning for each day helps move children on quickly. For example, children were observed listening very carefully and acquiring important phonics skills. By the end of the year even the lowest attainers are fully confident at reading simple words.
- At the start most children have only a basic understanding of number. They are significantly helped to learn the shape of numbers by the way staff use tactile resources. The most able children are extended well and are already starting to recognise numbers beyond 20.
- Staff make the best use of the outdoor area to support learning which is very well supervised. There are many planned opportunities to extend creativity and language development.

- Well-chosen equipment is in place to extend children’s knowledge of the world. This created great excitement when a small group discovered how to change the direction of water flow by using the chutes.
- The early years leader carefully checks the impact learning activities have on children’s progress. She uses this effectively to address weaknesses in both the provision and children’s learning. Her rigorous attention to safeguarding and children’s welfare benefits their learning considerably.

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	123644
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	449286

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Iestyn Lewis
Headteacher	Naomi Pauley
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 November 2010
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