

Inspection of a good school: Valley Road Academy

Corporation Road, Hendon, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 8PL

Inspection dates:

18 and 19 October 2022

Outcome

Valley Road Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a warm and welcoming school. Leaders make sure that pupils and staff are valued as members of the school community. Staff look after pupils well. Staff take the time to listen to pupils who have any concerns. Pupils are happy and feel safe. Parents are very positive about the school. They especially enjoy the craft afternoons, where parents and carers are invited into school to work with their children, promoting the school's 'working together' approach.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils. Pupils work hard and find their lessons interesting. For example, older pupils talked about how their learning around historical events has helped them to understand the way modern Britain has come to have such varied cultures represented.

Nursery and Reception children enjoy learning indoors and outdoors. Children demonstrated how they practise what they are learning in mathematics and communication and language through a variety of themed areas relating to autumn, Halloween and the stories they have been sharing.

Leaders know where more work is needed to further develop the curriculum in small areas of the school. Leaders are working to develop the curriculum for those with the most complex special educational needs. Leaders include a range of different experiences for pupils across the curriculum. These help pupils develop an understanding of the world beyond their local area.

Pupils are respectful of staff and each other. Pupils talk about the school's values, which are being respectful, tolerant and kind. These values underpin the school's personal, social, health and citizenship programme. Pupils take part in a very wide range of activities. These include trips and visits to local beaches, farms and museums, as well as various sporting events. These activities support the development of pupils' personal skills well. Older pupils understand the protected characteristics. Bullying is rare, but pupils know that if it happens, staff will help sort it out quickly. Pupils who need additional help in lessons are supported well by staff.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders think carefully about what they want pupils to achieve when designing the curriculum. Leaders systematically review each area of the curriculum to check that the planned curriculum matches the needs of the pupils in the school. For example, leaders recently changed the history curriculum so that it better matched the pupils' needs by ensuring that the teaching built on prior learning. Leaders know they need to further refine the learning opportunities in some classes to ensure the learning environment, the opportunities to access the curriculum and individual learning plans match the needs of all pupils.

The curriculum offer builds curiosity. Pupils are interested and enthusiastic in lessons. Subject leaders are knowledgeable about the subject they lead. They check pupils' learning to identify areas for improvement and gaps in pupils' knowledge. Pupils recall prior learning well. For example, in mathematics, pupils link what they know about number and place value to new learning. They are encouraged to practise what they have learned so that it becomes fluent and supports future learning.

Reading is a high priority. Staff are well trained and deliver the reading programme effectively. Pupils enjoy reading a wide range of books and can name their favourite books and authors. Leaders ensure that the phonics programme is planned and implemented well. Children begin to develop early reading skills as soon as they start school. They then move into more formal phonics lessons from Reception. Pupils read books that match the sounds that they know. Regular assessments help teachers to identify pupils who need extra help in phonics. Leaders ensure that pupils who find reading difficult get extra help to catch up. For a small number of pupils, the phonics programme continues into key stage 2.

In all subjects, teachers sequence work in a logical way. Teachers remind pupils of their past learning so that pupils remember essential ideas. In history, younger pupils learn about the world that is familiar to them. Pupils then extend their knowledge, learning about different historical eras. Pupils are supported to use their previous knowledge to support new learning. For example, teachers remind pupils what they have previously learned about the concept of invasion. They discuss how this knowledge will help them to develop their understanding of the reasons behind the outbreak of the Second World War.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or, disabilities (SEND) is highly effective for the vast majority of pupils. Pupils' needs are identified promptly. In lessons, adults provide well-thought-out support to help pupils with SEND fully access the curriculum. For a very small number of pupils with the most complex needs, leaders are establishing processes that will better support their learning opportunities.

Pupils behave well in classes and around the school. Most pupils attend school regularly. Staff promote pupils' wider development well. Pupils have a strong understanding of respect for, and acceptance of, others. The school leaders are very proud of their school's approach to mental well-being. They have worked with mental health services to develop a programme of pupil 'Mental Health Ambassadors' who work with the adults in school.

Together they promote well-being across the school community. Leaders provide a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities to meet the different interests of pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders ensure that all required checks are carried out when recruiting new staff. Training and induction records are carefully maintained and managed. All staff have regular and relevant training on how to keep pupils safe. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil. Leaders know pupils, families and the community well. Staff engage appropriately with outside agencies to provide help and support for pupils when needed. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. Pupils learn how to stay safe when online, when out in the community or in places where there may be higher risks such as the beach or at a farm. Pupils know how to respond to any concerns around bullying or name-calling.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum is not delivered as well as it needs to a small number of pupils with complex special educational needs. This means that pupils are not making as much progress as they could. It is clear from leaders' actions that they are in the process of bringing about change to address this issue. Leaders need to complete their review of curriculum delivery across the school and implement their planned improvements within the identified timescale.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Valley Road Primary School, to be good in May 2013.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View

when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	144221
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10241389
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	352
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Darren Andrews
Headteacher	Rebekah Bowman
Website	www.valleyroadschool.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average primary school.
- This school does not use alternative provision.
- This school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND. It caters for seven pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held several meetings with the headteacher during the inspection.
- The inspector met with the deputy head teacher, the assistant head teacher, the special educational needs and disabilities leads, teachers and support staff.
- The inspector met with members of the trust.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject

leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult and heard pupils read.
- The inspector spoke to pupils about their learning and experiences at school.
- The inspector reviewed safeguarding documentation and records for behaviour and attendance.
- The inspector reviewed the responses received through the Ofsted questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. There were no responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire or Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.
- The inspector met with various groups of staff during the inspection to gather their views.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour throughout the school day, including during lesson visits and at breaktimes and lunchtimes. The inspector spoke to pupils about their views on behaviour and the wider experiences they receive at school.

Inspection team

Catherine Beard, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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