

Inspection of The Valley School

Broadhall Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 9BN

Inspection dates:	5 and 6 November 2024
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at this school are happy and positive. They are kept safe. Strong routines make life predictable for pupils, and they are very clear about what is expected of them. This is because pupils understand, and can explain, the school rules around being ready to learn, being respectful and being safe.

Pupils appreciate that they are trusted to behave appropriately, and they take this responsibility very seriously. They learn to regulate their emotions successfully. When they struggle with this, they are helped by trusted staff. This means that pupils are keen to contribute to their learning. They help each other and sustain warm and positive relationships with peers and adults.

Pupils are expected to work hard and achieve well, which they typically do. They are well prepared for their next steps through securing the right accreditation and learning to be as independent as possible. They are supported to secure the skills they need to be ready for life beyond school. For example, they practise road safety, learn to travel independently and learn how to manage lunch off site. Pupils in Year 7 are well supported before and when they arrive at the school, enabling them to feel ready for learning and be successful at it.

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

The school offers a broad and ambitious curriculum for its pupils. It allows pupils to develop their interests and talents, as well as study a range of subjects from the national curriculum. In most subjects, the key knowledge that pupils should learn has been carefully identified. It builds in complexity as pupils become more confident and embed the strong foundations for future learning. For example, pupils learn about components of language such as vocabulary, sentences and conjunctives. They build on these as their writing increases in length and sophistication. Pupils strengthen their knowledge of number as they measure and calculate across subjects such as 'enterprise' and cookery. The school has correctly identified a small number of subjects that are less securely designed and have taken positive steps to make improvements. These improvements are in their early stages of development and need time to be fully realised.

Teachers present new knowledge clearly and effectively, and tasks they set help pupils to remember their learning. Pupils' needs are well met, and advice from specialists, such as speech and language and occupational therapists, is used to tailor support in lessons. Teachers use effective questioning to deepen pupils' understanding and check what pupils have learned regularly. Sometimes, checking what pupils understand in lessons isn't precise enough. Occasionally, teachers do not check that pupils have understood their learning before moving on. Pupils' progress through the curriculum is checked at regular points across the year. The information that this provides helps to refine the curriculum.

The school has addressed the key points outlined in the last inspection and has implemented an approved phonics scheme for those at the early stages of reading. This is

delivered by experts and is having a positive impact on pupils' reading fluency and accuracy. Pupils are learning to read more quickly.

Behaviour at The Valley School is exemplary. This is because leaders have a well-embedded behaviour policy, which is very well understood. They encourage pupils to behave independently and responsibly. For example, pupils are taught to use their phones sensibly at breaktimes.

The school's wider development of pupils is excellent. For example, pupils shop locally for materials for their design and technology projects. They visit museums and galleries, perform in musicals and participate in sporting and arts clubs. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe online and in the community. They learn about healthy eating, fitness and appropriate relationships. The careers program, preparation for adulthood and transition support are exceptional.

The school has been well led through a rapid increase in the number of pupils and moving into a new building. Despite these high levels of change, staff feel their well-being, workload and professional development are prioritised by leaders. Pupils' education, therefore, benefits from consistent and well-trained staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of subjects, the curriculum is not as precisely sequenced as it needs to be. This leads to gaps in pupils' knowledge and makes remembering learning more difficult for pupils. The school must ensure that it carefully considers and clearly sets out key pieces of knowledge and when they should be learned for all subjects so that pupils learn with greater success.
- The school does not always check pupils' prior learning with enough precision. This means that teachers occasionally move learning on when some pupils have not securely embedded what is being taught. This leads to gaps in pupils' knowledge. The school must ensure that teachers have the required knowledge and expertise to consistently check what all pupils have learned and understood before moving them on to new learning.

How can I feedback 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' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	117669
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345214
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	190
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Elizabeth Ellis
Headteacher	David Pearce
Website	https://thevalley.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 July 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school moved into a new building in January 2024.
- The school roll has grown from 165 to 190 over the last three years.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision.
- The school has pupils with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, including autism, speech, language and communication difficulties and moderate learning difficulties.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and

management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth-form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English including early reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education and physical education. To do this, they met with subject leaders, held discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. Other subjects were considered as part of this inspection.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school and priorities for improvement.
- The inspection team met with senior leaders, a selection of subject leaders, teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector met with representatives from the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. They also spoke with a school improvement partner from the local authority and a leader from the alternative provision used by the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were considered through discussions and their responses to Ofsted's online surveys.

Inspection team

Una Buckley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Joe Creswick

Ofsted Inspector

Lynda Walker

Ofsted Inspector

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