

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Valence School

Westerham Road, Westerham, Kent TN16 1QN

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 June 2025

Outcome

Valence School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils embody the school's values, including independence and resilience. They show this in their hard work and determination in all the activities they undertake. Pupils build deep and trusting relationships with staff. They know that staff will help them to address any concerns they have. The school has built a strong community that pupils and staff contribute to positively. This helps pupils to feel happy and safe. Pupils behave exceptionally well.

All pupils have a clear voice in the school. They elect their school council members. These representatives take part in recruitment interviews and work with leaders to identify improvements to the school. Pupils and staff work together carefully to address issues in school effectively. They share their views confidently. Pupils consider views that differ to their own with great maturity. They know that all adults consider their views sensitively.

Pupils have multiple and complex barriers to learning. However, there is no limit to the aspirations for pupils. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They help them to achieve this through a deeply personalised approach. This helps pupils to learn the skills and knowledge they need. As a result, pupils achieve very well.

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

The school has worked hard to refine its curriculum since the previous inspection. It has designed very ambitious content matched precisely to the specific needs of pupils. The school has identified precisely the skills and knowledge pupils need to be successful. Teachers sequence content logically from early years to sixth form. The school uses well designed individual plans that set out the personalised programmes for each pupil. The

skilled residential and therapy teams enhance this work consistently well. All staff plan support that helps pupils thrive.

Staff are experts in their subjects. They ensure that they design learning activities that develop pupils' understanding over time. Teachers adapt these activities to provide all pupils with the deep knowledge of the curriculum they need. They use a range of communication strategies to explain learning clearly to all pupils. The checks that teachers make on pupils' understanding are precise. This helps staff to identify any gaps in knowledge swiftly. Teachers use these checks effectively to address any gaps in knowledge that exist.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Many also have life-limiting and degenerative conditions. The school ensures that all staff know their pupils very well. This information helps staff to provide pupils with the specialist care they need. This means that all pupils have the help they need to achieve well and be well prepared for their next steps.

The school ensures that pupils learn crucial skills for communication so they can access the curriculum fully. Pupils in the early stages of reading receive high-quality support to learn the sounds and letters they need. Starting in Reception Year, skilled teachers provide pupils with a rich experience of texts and stories. All pupils learn how to express their needs and wishes. Staff respond sensitively to these. Pupils learn a range of mathematical concepts and can apply these accurately.

Students in the sixth form are generally well prepared for the next steps. All pupils achieve a range of meaningful qualifications. Pupils develop crucial skills of independence and employability. For example, pupils work in a school shop in the local village. This gives them a firm grounding in interpersonal skills and money handling. However, the school does not provide impartial careers advice for older pupils. While they receive support from school staff, a small number of pupils who would benefit from it do not receive specialist careers advice for their next steps. This potentially limits students' knowledge of next steps into education or employment.

The school is a calm and happy place. The school day starts with warm interactions between staff and pupils. Classrooms are deeply purposeful. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They work hard and show high levels of concentration. Pupils are courteous and friendly. They chat happily with their friends and staff at breaktimes. Pupils' complex medical needs mean that many of them cannot attend frequently. However, the school ensures that these pupils receive high levels of specialist support to engage with learning. Attendance improves for these pupils over time.

The school's work to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain is very effective. Pupils learn about the importance of mutual respect. They demonstrate this in the care and consideration they show for each other. Pupils celebrate diversity. 'We treat everyone the same,' said one pupil. This is a view shared by all. Pupils love being part of the school community. They enjoy earning house points and are proud to attend.

Leaders at all levels are tireless in their work. Together with staff they reflect deeply on their ambitions for pupils and work collaboratively to ensure this ambition is fully realised. Despite a small number of staff who feel their workload is high, the vast majority are very positive about the school. Governors share these ambitions. They work closely with the school and offer support and challenge in equal measure. Staff are dedicated and well trained. They hold the best interests of pupils at the heart of their work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not provide pupils with careers information and guidance they need. As a result, a small number of pupils are not as well prepared for their next steps as they should be. The school needs to ensure that the curriculum for pupils' careers advice and guidance contains all the relevant information and opportunities for them to make informed choices regarding their next steps

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 school to be good for overall effectiveness in December 2019.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (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	119032
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10379814
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	132
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Davies
Principal	Matthew Strange
Website	www.valenceschool.com
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 December 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school's headteacher and senior leadership team have changed since the previous inspection.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school provides residential provision for a number of pupils. The residential provision was not included in this inspection of the school's education provision.
- The school caters for pupils aged four to 19 who have physical disability.
- 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

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors met with the principal and other leaders. The lead inspector also met members of the governing body. They also held a telephone conversation with a member of the local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Throughout the inspection, inspectors met with groups of staff and also considered the opinions expressed through the staff survey.
- Inspectors paid regard to the views which parents expressed through the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Gavin Thomas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Helen Middleton

Ofsted Inspector

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