



# The Valley School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 117669  
**LEA** HERTFORDSHIRE LEA  
**Inspection number** 280126  
**Inspection dates** 9 February 2006 to 10 February 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mr. Declan McCarthy LI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special	<b>School address</b>	Valley Way
<b>School category</b>	Community special		SG2 9AB
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01438747274
<b>Number on roll</b>	165	<b>Fax number</b>	01438747966
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Ms.J Joyce
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	27 November 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr. R G Stabler

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 16	<b>Inspection dates</b> 9 February 2006 - 10 February 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 280126
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The Valley School provides for up to 173 day pupils of secondary age with moderate learning difficulties (MLD). Of the 168 pupils currently on roll, approximately half of them enter from a primary MLD school in Letchworth with the remainder coming from a variety of mainstream schools, special schools or units. All pupils have statements of special educational needs and about 60% of pupils have additional complex needs such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), sensory impairments or speech, language and communication disorders. There are more of these pupils in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4 representing a trend to admit more pupils with complex needs. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average. There are eight 'looked-after' pupils and three pupils on the Child Protection register. The socio-economic backgrounds of pupils are varied. Pupils enter the school with very low levels of attainment. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage with nearly three times more boys than girls. There are no pupils who are learning English as an additional language

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

The school provides a good education for its pupils. All pupils make good progress academically and in their personal development, as a result of good teaching and good use of assessment in planning lessons. Progress of pupils at Key Stage 4 is good for pupils in vocational subjects when courses are matched closely to their needs and aspirations, however it is satisfactory overall, because the range of vocational courses available is limited. The curriculum is good, with a wide range of learning opportunities to promote achievement. Good support from outside professional staff impacts positively on progress. Pupils are happy and enthusiastic learners, they are well behaved and rapidly gain in confidence. The school provides good quality care support and guidance for pupils. Leadership and management are good and the headteacher receives very good support from the deputy and assistant headteachers. Governance is satisfactory overall, but governors have yet to develop their strategic roles and ensure all statutory requirements are met. Although the headteacher is due to retire at the end of term, strong teamwork is enabling the school to move forward. Most parents are highly satisfied with the school. Pupils like the school and say they are happy. They are confident they have somebody to speak to if they are worried. The school provides good value for money. The inspection confirms that the school's self-evaluation is accurate and its capacity to improve is good. There have been good improvements to accommodation and resources, particularly the use of information and communication technology (ICT), which impacts positively on pupils' progress. The school knows exactly what it needs to do to improve further. For example, it is working to improve the involvement of governors and is developing more opportunities for pupils to gain vocational qualifications.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that there are more opportunities for pupils to take vocational courses. -
- Ensure that governors develop and implement procedures for checking how well the school is doing and make sure that all statutory requirements are met.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils make good progress overall towards their individual education plan targets. Higher attainers and average attaining pupils met or exceeded their targets in 2005. However those with additional learning difficulties did not meet all their targets. Nevertheless the school analysed this information and has already put in place strategies, which are now proving effective in raising achievement for this group of pupils. For example setting arrangements and the quality of teaching have been improved so that all pupils, irrespective of ability, now make good academic progress and very good progress in personal development. Pupils' progress in English, mathematics, science and in ICT is consistently good across the school. Lessons are sharply focused on ensuring that expectations for learning are high and work is matched

to different learning needs of individual pupils. Pupils with autism, those with communication difficulties and those with sensory impairments make progress equal to that of their peers. There are no significant differences in the progress made by boys and girls or pupils of different backgrounds. Older pupils make good progress in work related learning and in the wide range of accredited courses available to them. Their progress is enhanced by good college links, so that by the time they leave school, pupils acquire the basic literacy, numeracy and independence skills to prepare them for adult life.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils make good progress in their personal, social, moral, cultural and spiritual development. They have good attitudes and are happy at school. They are confident that there is an adult with whom they could speak if they had a problem and they have good relationships with the staff. Behaviour is usually good and most pupils attend regularly. Pupils are learning to make healthy choices, assisted by the nutritious school meals, and involvement in a wide range of sporting activities. In science and personal, social and health education, they find out how to stay safe and learn about the negative effects of habits such as smoking. The amount of work that pupils produce and the way that they apply themselves in lessons show that they enjoy learning. They make a good contribution to the community through fundraising, such as that for blind children in Africa, through acting as house captains, taking responsibility around the school and as members of the school council. The good progress that they make in developing basic skills and in finding out about the world of work prepares them well for life after school.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning were judged to be satisfactory by the school. However, this reflected staffing difficulties in the past year. Inspection findings show that teaching is now good overall and sometimes outstanding, which is consistent with the schools' own recent monitoring of improvements in teaching and learning. Lessons are carefully planned so that the needs of individual pupils are taken into account. Teachers make good use of resources such as the interactive whiteboards, which captivate pupils' imaginations and make learning fun. As a result, pupils are focused on their activities and try their hardest. Homework makes a significant contribution to pupils' learning. The practice of emailing homework tasks to pupils in science is innovative and deepens their understanding. Teaching assistants support the learning of all pupils, very effectively by ensuring a close match of methods and resources to pupils' needs so they can participate fully in learning. There are good systems of assessment in place which include the use of 'P Scales' and National curriculum levels recorded in all subjects. These are used with increasing effectiveness by nearly all teachers in planning.

The setting of targets for pupils, when teachers' mark each piece of their work, - found most consistently in English - is an example of excellent practice. Staff have a very good knowledge of pupils, checking carefully how well they are doing. Teachers explain clearly to pupils what they are expected to achieve and check at the end of the lesson how well they have done.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is good and supports pupils' academic achievement and personal development well. The organisation of pupils into classes based on their learning needs means that work is matched closely to the needs of different groups. Pupils' enjoyment and achievement in science are greatly enhanced by excellent use of the digital microscope to show the detail of animal specimens collected by pupils in the school's natural woodland habitat. Video conferencing is being used to enrich the curriculum, and fundraising for its link school in Africa means that pupils have a very real opportunity to learn about contributing to the wider community. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to take GCSE in English, mathematics and science, to gain basic certificates in a number of other subjects and some also follow the Junior Sports Leaders Award. The school has developed a range of opportunities for pupils to extend their skills in Years 10 and 11. It seeks to match vocational opportunities for its older pupils to their interests and aspirations. Pupils who are capable of moving directly to employment when they leave school have the chance to attend one of a number of courses at college leading to qualifications in skills such as plumbing, plastering, painting and decorating. The majority of pupils attend college one morning a week in preparation for transferring to vocational courses when they leave. A transition course is provided on the school site for those pupils with the greatest level of need who attend during Year 11 and are able to continue with this at post-16. The school is, rightly, developing more opportunities for pupils to gain vocational qualifications and to learn about enterprise at school in Years 10 and 11, particularly through extending the qualifications on offer. Pupils' learning is enriched by a good range of educational visits, clubs and performances, and the school welcomes visitors, such as a famous writer and illustrator, who help to bring learning to life. Activity week extends the range of learning opportunities available to pupils, giving them the chance to try new activities and extend their social skills.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school cares well for its pupils and does all that it can to make sure that they are protected and feel safe. It provides good support to pupils who have additional learning needs and works well with other agencies in identifying pupils' needs and supporting them academically and personally. The daily sessions in basic skills ensure that pupils regularly practise towards reaching the targets in their individual education plans. In the best of these sessions, tasks are matched precisely to the needs of individual pupils and they receive excellent guidance in how to tackle their difficulties. The way that

teachers remind pupils of their targets in their weekly planners also ensures that pupils are working continuously to improve. Effective systems are in place for tracking pupils' progress. Their behaviour is generally managed well and staff are readily available to support pupils who need it. Working closely with the Connexions service, the school provides pupils with thorough guidance about the options open to them when they leave.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The head teacher receives very good support from the deputy and assistant head teachers in developing and managing the school effectively. Self-evaluation is accurate and the school knows what it does well and where it could be even better. For example, it has continually improved the quality of teaching so that it is now good. The head is due to retire at the end of the spring term and a new head teacher has been appointed. The strong team work and commitment among staff places the school in a good position for a smooth transfer of leadership and to make further improvements. Subject leadership is now good. Subject leaders have audited their subjects effectively, developed effective action plans, and have begun to monitor teaching and learning well. This has led to improved teaching, learning and progress within subjects. All staff are committed to the individual needs of pupils, take their views seriously and consult parents widely. Governance is satisfactory. Although there has been difficulty with recruitment and retention, the governing body continues to develop its role. For example governors have linked with senior managers in evaluating the specific aspects of the school's work and are becoming more involved in school improvement and financial planning. Although they are supportive of the school, they are not currently checking how well the school is doing in each aspect of its work and they have not ensured that the statutory requirements under the race relations act are met. Nevertheless, the school is committed to ensuring all pupils have equality of opportunity and access to the full curriculum. Accommodation is exceptional and learning resources, including ICT, are good. These are used fully to support learning, achievement and enjoyment. The high quality display in classrooms and around the school makes an excellent contribution to pupils' achievement and personal development. It is stimulating and attractive and celebrates the significant amount of work that pupils produce.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

### **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for sharing your views with us and making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. I am writing to tell you about what we found. Your headteacher and staff rightly believe that The Valley is a good school. You are all making good progress because teaching is good and your teachers really help you to do better in lessons. You have good opportunities to take examinations and go to college when you are older. You say you are happy in school and we saw how enthusiastic you were in your learning. You are well behaved and you quickly become more confident in school because staff really care and give you lots of help when you need it. Your school is well run and everyone works together to make sure you do well. Here are some things that could make your school even better. You could have more opportunities to study courses related to different jobs when you are older. Why not tell your teachers what kinds of courses you would like to study? The governors should visit your school more often to see how well you are doing. You can help them to do this by showing them some of your work and telling them what you think about the school. Continue to do your best and enjoy The Valley school.