

The Vale Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131991
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	293912
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter McGregor

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Douglas Livingstone
Headteacher	Mrs Claire Regnard
Date of previous school inspection	12 February 2001
School address	Beaconsfield Road Epsom KT18 6HP
Telephone number	01372 273639
Fax number	01372 279349

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Vale is an average sized primary school. The percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals, and from minority ethnic groups are below national averages. The proportion of pupils having statements of special educational needs is above average, as is the proportion who come from advantaged backgrounds. A below average proportion of pupils have a mother tongue other than English. Healthy Schools status has been achieved. The headteacher was unwell at the time of the inspection and so her deputy was acting headteacher. Both are recent appointments.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Vale provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has strengths in the quality of the curriculum and the clarity of direction for improvement.

Pupils leave Year 6 with above average standards. Pupils are very articulate and speak with great confidence, although occasional over-confidence restricts their learning. Their reading skills are good. After a dip in standards in mathematics and science, satisfactory progress is now being made through a focus on improving pupils' numeracy skills, and effective teaching and learning of scientific investigative work. Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are above average. Pupils make good progress in their Reception year and progress satisfactorily overall.

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and feel safe. Attendance is good and pupils make a valuable contribution to school life, accepting and enjoying responsibility. Most pupils are happy at school. Behaviour is satisfactory, with most pupils caring sensibly for one another. A few upset their peers during breaks and lunchtime through inconsiderate behaviour. Pupils' personal development and their preparation for future life are satisfactory.

The quality of teaching and learning is good in Reception and satisfactory overall. Strengths outweigh weaknesses. Relationships in lessons are positive. Teaching weaknesses, however, restrict what can be achieved, particularly in mathematics and science and by the most capable. The good curriculum is creative, with a broad range of subjects and activities. Effective planning promotes continuity in teaching and learning. Pupils benefit from above average weekly teaching time and a wide range of clubs. Staff know their pupils well and generally provide appropriate pastoral care, although supervision of pupils out of lessons is inconsistent. The school uses a good system to track individual pupils' progress, and provide additional support as required. In some subjects the use of this assessment data is not yet fully maximised to plan work for pupils of all abilities.

Governance has improved significantly in the past year and now provides an effective 'critical friend' role. Staffing problems have affected standards in some classes. Senior managers monitor teaching and work, promoting higher standards where shortfalls are identified. Systems introduced by the new leadership team this year are having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning but have not been in place long enough to resolve all weaknesses. Leaders are taking effective steps to make improvements in several areas of school life.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning, particularly in mathematics and science and for the most capable pupils.
- Develop monitoring and data systems so that information gathered on individuals' progress is used to plan additional support where needed and raise achievement.
- Resolve behaviour problems, particularly during lunch and break periods.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' progress is satisfactory and improving as a result of a greater focus on tracking individuals' work and better teaching. Their standards on entry and when they leave are above average. Records and observations show that children do well in the Reception class, particularly in the progress they make in language acquisition. They are good independent learners by the time they transfer to Year 1; the majority have exceeded the Early Learning Goals, attaining above expected levels of skills and knowledge. In Years 1 to 6, above average standards and satisfactory progress in English are apparent in well-presented written work and pupils' knowledge of what they have been taught. Standards are not as high in mathematics and science, though recent progress has been satisfactory. Work is good when pupils are challenged by the activities set. In classes where the pace of learning is slow and expectations are not high enough, pupils, particularly high attainers, underachieve. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well when provided with additional support; their achievement overall is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Pupils' understanding of other cultures, as senior managers are aware, is not as strong as in other areas. Most pupils are happy to come to school, as shown by their good attendance and positive attitudes. Behaviour is satisfactory overall and in lessons is often good. Some pupils are upset by the misbehaviour and hurtful comments of a few during break and lunch periods. They do feel safe at school, however, and think staff are easy to speak with. One comment showed pupils' eagerness to take responsibility: 'We have real tasks not just jobs for jobs' sake, we help teachers run assemblies.' School council members take their roles very seriously. Pupils are very supportive of the local community, for example raising funds for good causes and singing at charity events. They appreciate how important it is to become involved in sport and to eat healthily. They feel well informed about their transfer to secondary school. Their sound personal development and satisfactory literacy, numeracy and ICT skills mean they are adequately prepared for the next stage in their lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school's evaluation that the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall is accurate. In the Foundation Stage, teachers provide a rich learning experience, providing good practical activities that engage children of different capabilities. Throughout the school, teachers generally use modern technology well to motivate pupils. They manage behaviour effectively, although some pupils can be particularly challenging. Teaching assistants and additional adults are used well to assist with learning. Ongoing assessment of pupils' knowledge and understanding is not always rigorous enough, resulting in work not well matched to pupils' capabilities in some lessons. Occasionally teachers' lack of subject knowledge in aspects of mathematics and science is an issue, for example when technical terms are not explained accurately. Marking is satisfactory with accurate identification of errors, but pupils' books have few constructive comments to

help them improve further. Homework is set regularly although both parents and pupils find that it is not always suited to individuals. Staff changes and on-going staffing issues are unhelpful in promoting consistency in learning, a point made strongly by a number of parents.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

National Curriculum subjects are enhanced by a strong programme of personal health, social and citizenship education, and the teaching of French. Provision for sex and drugs education is good. All pupils experience a substantial literacy and numeracy lesson each day and an increasing number of support sessions are provided in response to identified underachievement. A good physical education curriculum is supported by breaktime and lunchtime activities where a very good range of equipment is available and used. Weekly ICT sessions enable pupils to improve their skills, which they then use in other subjects. The range of clubs and activities available is very good, some provided by the staff and others by groups brought in from outside, for which a fee is paid. Visitors and visits, including two residential stays in Years 5 and 6, add further width to the curriculum and enhance the social skills of pupils. Within this overall good picture, timetables indicate too great a variation in the amount of time for subjects, such as science, in different classes.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory quality of care, guidance and support. Staff know pupils well and relationships are good throughout the school. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are appropriate, complying with government requirements. External agencies are used effectively to provide support. Supervision of pupils at break and lunch times is not always effective in preventing the misbehaviour of a few spoiling the enjoyment of the majority. A new tracking system, introduced this year, is effective in helping staff identify the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and the targeting of appropriate support. This is already leading to improvements in achievement for these pupils. Tracking data also shows that pupils' progress and achievements in mathematics and science are higher in 2007 than in recent years. The system is not yet being used consistently enough. For example in some classes the data is not being used well enough to challenge different groups of pupils, such as higher attainers in all subjects. Pupils are aware of their targets in English but are less clear in other subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The governing body has undergone some changes in membership in the past year and governors now visit regularly, and work closely with the school on identified priorities. In a short time the headteacher, deputy head and governors have successfully changed many things. The senior leadership team has a good, clear vision of a highly successful school, and has accurately identified areas for improvement in the self-evaluation form and development plan. They have begun to take action to tackle weaknesses, for example by providing support for staff, where needed, in teaching specific subjects, such as mathematics. Such initiatives are beginning to have a positive impact on improving teaching and pupils' achievement. Resources are satisfactory and used well, although the relatively small junior playground adds to the difficulties of managing pupils' lively behaviour.

Communication with parents is good; an annual questionnaire is used to find out about their views. Weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been addressed well, particularly in the way subject leaders work, demonstrating that the school has a good capacity to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

9 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Vale Primary School, Epsom, KT18 6HP

Thank you for your help during our time at your school. We really enjoyed meeting you and hearing your ideas and views. It was pleasing to hear how happy you are at The Vale, and we agree with you about how good the clubs and activities are.

Your school is satisfactory and improving. When you come into Reception you are doing better than many other children and when you leave in Year 6 the same is true. You make good progress in Reception and satisfactory progress as you move through the school. You have been much better at doing English than maths and science, but recently your maths and science have started to improve. You are skilful in using computers, and speak and read very well. Some of you can be a little over-confident at times which doesn't help your learning. Your attendance is good.

You told us how you feel safe at school and have learnt the importance of living healthily. You like taking responsibility as members of your school council and you have lots of opportunities to help make the school a good place to be. Most of you behave well and care for each other. A few of you can be quite mean at times and that upsets other children. We have asked the school to look carefully for this happening at breaks and in the lunchtime, and to stop it.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory but there are quite big differences between lessons. You get on well with your teachers and some lessons are really good but sometimes work is not at the right level for you, particularly in maths and science. We have asked the headteacher to check that teaching always helps you to learn and that you are all doing as well as you can, particularly those who find work easy. The school has a good new system to check on your progress and this needs to be used more often.

Your headteacher, with the support of her deputy headteacher, knows what to do next to help the school improve and is providing satisfactory leadership and management.

Best wishes,

Peter McGregor Lead Inspector