

Valence Infants' School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 101222 |
| Local Authority | Barking and Dagenham |
| Inspection number | 307616 |
| Inspection date | 13 November 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Keith Williams |

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

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| Type of school | Infant |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3-7 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 220 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr A Agrawal |
| Headteacher | Mrs V Ellar |
| Date of previous school inspection | 9 June 2003 |
| School address | Bonham Road Dagenham RM8 3AR |
| Telephone number | 020 8270 4473 |
| Fax number | 020 8270 4472 |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; teaching and learning; personal development and well-being; the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in other subjects; care, guidance and support; and leadership and management, particularly the role of governors in monitoring the school's work.

Evidence was gathered from: lesson observations, discussion with staff and pupils, the scrutiny of pupils' work, assessment data and documents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Just over half of the pupils at this average sized infant school are of White British heritage. The remainder are from a wide range of backgrounds, the largest groups being pupils from other White backgrounds and those of Black British heritage whose families have roots in Africa. An above average proportion speak English as an additional language, although few are at an early stage of learning the language. Although the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is about average, the school serves an area containing significant deprivation. The school's Nursery has Additional Resource Provision (the NARPs unit) for the assessment of pre-school children with special educational needs. The school has the Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstanding school sets out to enable all pupils to achieve their best. A combination of high quality leadership, teaching and care means that they succeed admirably. The school makes a real difference to pupils' lives and, as a result, pupils enjoy school immensely, behave impeccably and make excellent progress in their all-round development. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school's work, one encapsulating their views when commenting, 'I feel Valence Infants is a lovely place for my child to learn, I feel the children and their opinions matter...and they make learning fun.'

Pupils' skills and understanding when they first start school covers a wide range but, overall, it is well below that typically found. Their achievement in reaching above average standards by the end of Year 2 is outstanding. This is reflected in the results of the national assessments for seven year olds in recent years, and the work of current pupils shows that standards continue to be just as high. The school has been very successful in improving writing and, in 2007, standards were exceptionally high, with above average proportions reaching the higher Level 3. These results are a credit, not only to pupils, but also to teaching and support staff, who work tirelessly to ensure that pupils' individual needs are met. Those pupils identified as capable of reaching the higher levels receive extra work to challenge and inspire them. Those who find learning difficult are equally well supported, sometimes in the form of carefully devised individual programmes of learning, so that almost all reach the nationally expected levels. This wide ranging support ensures that boys and girls of all ability and background, including the few pupils who are at an early stage of learning English, achieve outstandingly well.

Exceptional leadership from the headteacher is a key factor in the school's success, and she is very well supported by other leaders, staff and governors. Pupils clearly come first and all are welcomed into the school community, valued and included in everything the school has to offer. Every step is taken to secure their health, safety and welfare. A close eye is kept on pupils identified as potentially vulnerable. Children in the NARPs unit are cared for exceptionally well; one parent emphasised the success of this provision when noting, 'He has improved more than we had hoped for.'

The leaders are modest about the school's effectiveness, but are extremely well informed about what is working well and what might be improved. This is because they monitor teaching and learning rigorously and evaluate tests and other assessments robustly. Staff at all levels contribute very well to the school's development. For example, the ICT coordinator has been instrumental in improving the way that computers are used in other subjects. Senior staff form a highly effective team because they use their strengths to complement each other's skills. Governors have improved their role. They are now involved well in monitoring the school's effectiveness and are increasingly able to hold the leaders to account. Senior leaders use the outcomes of their monitoring to set challenging targets that help to improve teaching and learning and maintain above average standards. Consequently, pupils benefit from consistently good and, often, outstanding lessons and this has a considerable impact on their progress. Teachers ensure that pupils are fully involved in their learning. They share what they are expected to learn at the beginning of lessons, give them good verbal and written feedback and help them to reflect on how they have done. For their part, pupils are very clear about the targets they are set, attentive, work hard and are eager to learn. Pupils enjoy the broad range of subjects on offer, many citing ICT and science amongst their favourites.

Planning for pupils' personal development is very strong. As a result, they make excellent progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and are very well prepared to be citizens of the future. For their age, pupils have a very well developed understanding of how to lead healthy and safe lives. They make suggestions for how the school might improve and report that these are taken seriously, for example in the steps taken to improve toilets. Beyond the school, pupils' enjoyment and learning are enhanced by a very good range of visits and activities. Trips to places of interest are particularly popular, one pupil reflecting on his visit to Mountfitchet Castle that, 'I didn't want to leave that place.' Given their rapid progress in basic skills, they are very well prepared for their economic well-being.

The leadership team have exceptional capacity to build on the school's many strengths and secure yet more improvement. Complacency is not tolerated. For example, when attendance was identified as a weakness in the last inspection, they improved systems to encourage and reward good attendance and worked with families to tackle persistent absence. As a result, the rate of attendance has increased each year and, because of the school's good efforts, is now in line with the national average. They have rightly identified that this rate should continue to rise and have the wherewithal to do so.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The Foundation Stage is extremely well led and managed and teamwork amongst staff is of the highest order. From their starting points, children achieve exceeding well and, by the time they enter Year 1, most have reached the goals expected of them. A very early assessment is made of children's needs and staff work very well together to meet them. Assessment systems are exemplary and are soon to be shared as a model of good practice amongst local schools. Children in the NARPs unit are fully included in the Nursery so that they, too, achieve exceptionally well. Children get off to a flying start in the very supportive Nursery and enjoy their time in school. As many have limited communication and language skills when they first start school, there is a very strong emphasis on developing their speaking and listening. This works very well and children's rapid progress continues in Reception.

What the school should do to improve further

- Work with parents to raise levels of attendance still further.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 |

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 1 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 1 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 1 |

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

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 1 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 |
| 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

22 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Valence Infants' School, Dagenham, RM8 3AR

Thank you for being so friendly when I visited your school and a special thank you to those of you who came to talk to me. You gave me lots of helpful information and I am writing to tell you what I found out.

Lots of your parents told me how good they think your school is and I agree with them. Your school is outstanding and I am sure that your teachers will tell you what that means! You are doing extremely well with your work because your teachers do an excellent job to make lessons interesting and fun and because you try so hard to do your best. This is one of the reasons why you enjoy school so much. They keep a very close check on how you are doing and make sure that you get extra help, or harder work, when you need it. They look after you very well and many of you told me how safe you feel in school.

I was pleased to see how well everyone gets on together in lessons and on the playground. Your behaviour is excellent. Well done and keep it up, because this is really important. I know that your teachers have been working hard to help you improve your writing and I was pleased to see how beautifully you write. Again, keep it up!

Even though your school is outstanding, your excellent headteacher and the other staff want it to get even better. Your teachers have been working with your families to make sure that you come to school every day. I was very pleased to see that this is getting better all the time. I agree that it needs to keep getting better and I know you will help. Remember, you can only do your best if you come to school every day.

Once again, thank you very much for your help and good luck for the future.

Keith Williams

Lead inspector