

Valley School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106168
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	309044
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Hilton
Headteacher	Mrs C Goodlet
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2004
School address	Whitehaven Road Bramhall Stockport Cheshire SK7 1EN
Telephone number	0161 4397343
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Age group	2–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Valley School provides for pupils with severe learning difficulties and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, and mainstream pupils in the inclusive Nursery, which is an integral part of the school. A third of the pupils have additional autistic spectrum conditions. Most pupils in the school and Nursery are from a White British background although there are a small minority of pupils from a mainly Asian heritage. There are twice as many boys as girls.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school which strives to improve the provision constantly for all its learners. Because of their learning difficulties the standards reached by pupils are exceptionally low but all pupils do well in their studies and most make excellent progress. The pupils love coming to school and parents are very happy for their children to attend, knowing they will be safe, that they enjoy their lessons and that the school has high expectations of their success. A typical parental comment is 'I couldn't be happier with my son's progress since attending the Valley School.' The pupils' achievements are underpinned by their excellent progress in their personal development.

The quality of teaching is outstanding. Pupils enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. Lessons are very well planned and this has shown substantial improvement since the previous inspection. Lessons are characterised by the high quality of support given to pupils by the well trained teaching assistants. There is excellent provision for pupils with autism and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. A strength of the teaching lies in the outstanding quality of assessment, whereby each small step in pupils' progress is carefully recorded. This ensures a secure and accurate base for the school's excellent tracking of pupils' overall achievement. Teachers thus have a very good overview of pupils' progress. As a result of the excellent assessment and tracking, learning activities are very well tailored to pupils' needs and this has a positive impact on pupils' progress. The schemes of work in English, mathematics and personal, health and social education (PHSE) are particularly effective in extending pupils' basic skills and personal development. The school recognises that programmes in some other subjects need to be revised and updated. The curriculum is enriched by the excellent procedures to enable pupils to learn and mix socially with pupils at a number of local mainstream schools.

The pupils thrive within the caring and supportive ethos of the school. They feel secure and well supported. They learn to remain healthy, to keep safe and to behave well. They value the school and this is evident through the good relationships they have with staff and the good attendance of most pupils.

The provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding. Pupils in the Nursery are constantly 'busy'. They enjoy their learning and they make excellent progress. Children learn to behave appropriately and to work and play cooperatively. They receive an excellent start to their education. Parents consistently praise the Nursery provision. For example, parents commented, 'The nursery is absolutely wonderful. We would recommend it to anybody'.

All this is driven by exceptional leadership and management. The headteacher is highly regarded by staff and her work is outstanding in monitoring and improving standards. She is supported by a very able deputy. The management team has been very effective in leading staff in the drive to improve pupils' achievements. Staff are confident that they will be supported and encouraged to continually extend their knowledge and skills. The school evaluates its work extremely well. It seeks and acts on the views of all connected with the school, not least the pupils themselves. The governing body is very supportive and monitors aspects of the school's work robustly. The school has made substantial improvement in its performance since the previous inspection and has an outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision is outstanding because all the pupils make excellent progress in their knowledge and understanding and in their personal development. Teachers know the pupils very well. Teachers adapt activities skilfully to meet the needs of each pupil and as a result, supported by enthusiastic teaching, pupils enjoy their work and try their best. Children with learning difficulties and those with higher ability mix very well. The more able pupils support their friends. The Nursery is calm because the pupils feel safe and routines are well established. The staff maintain excellent relationships with children. They are warm and encouraging while managing the pupils' behaviour very well. Parents are welcomed into the Nursery and they are well informed each day about their child's progress. The Foundation Stage is very well led and managed. There are very good procedures for childrens' transition from Nursery to Reception and then into the main school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Complete the revision of those schemes of work yet to be updated to help improve further pupils' progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

All pupils, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties and those with autistic conditions, achieve well and many make outstanding progress. Pupils in the foundation stage make excellent progress and this gets them off to a flying start if they join the main school. The ensuing assessment and tracking of pupils' progress in the acquisition of basic skills is exceptional, and this has a significant impact on their continuing achievement. Teachers capture each small step in progress which pupils make and this leads to well focused targets for each pupil's further improvement. Many pupils make excellent progress in meeting challenging targets in their individual education plan (IEP). All pupils achieve exceptionally well in their communication and personal development.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' excellent progress in personal development reflects the school's strong management of behaviour and emphasis on moral and social values. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils gradually develop an awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles through the many opportunities to take part in physical activity. They make excellent gains in their social skills and their ability to collaborate with others because teachers provide many structured opportunities for them to work and play together. Pupils are encouraged to practise and generalise their personal skills throughout the day in all their activities such as when eating at snack time or in taking the register to the school office. All the pupils make clear, measurable gains in the personal development targets in their individual education plan.

Pupils feel safe and confident and know what is expected from them within the school's calm and supportive atmosphere. The pupils' enjoy their activities and school life. Parents say that their children love to be at school. The school's records show that bullying is almost unknown. The many parents who returned questionnaires were unanimous in their unqualified praise for

the school and its impact on their children's lives. Typically, parents wrote, 'The teaching staff.. have made enormous steps in unlocking the potential' of our children.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers know their pupils very well and this enables them to plan interesting well paced lessons. There are very good relationships between classroom teams and between staff and pupils. The teaching assistants support pupils very effectively. The pupils like their teachers and the support staff. They enjoy their lessons and try their best. For example, two pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties made exceptional progress in visually tracking and then reaching for a light source because of the encouragement they received from their teacher. There is a very effective emphasis on the development of communication skills and this significantly enhances pupils' involvement in learning activities. All classroom staff play a full part in assessing and recording each small step in pupils' progress. As a result, the teachers are able to plan challenging activities for each pupil, so enabling them to make good and often outstanding progress. The management of behaviour is excellent. Pupils understand and respond to clear routines. When a pupil's behaviour becomes unacceptable it is dealt with calmly and with understanding and support for the pupil involved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The very focused and accurate assessment of pupils' progress enables teachers to adapt work very specifically to the needs of each pupil. Programmes in PHSE underpin much of the school's work and these have a significant impact on pupils' achievement in personal skills, their knowledge about the advantages of a healthy lifestyle and about their own safety. The school's provision for the development of pupils' communication skills is extremely effective. There is a range of activities, including an annual residential experience, to take pupils out of the classroom, teaching them to behave appropriately in the community. The school provides opportunities for pupils to socialise and work in mainstream schools. This adds substantially to pupils' social skills, their self-confidence and their interest in learning. Several after school clubs are running successfully. The school has made substantial improvement to the curriculum since the previous inspection. This has led to well managed and effective programmes in basic skills in literacy, numeracy and personal development. There are other subject schemes of work, which, as the school is aware, are not as appropriate.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides a high standard of care. It maintains excellent links with outside agencies to help ensure that all pupils' needs are fully addressed. Child protection procedures are effective. There are appropriate procedures for risk assessments and the necessary checks on staff are in place. There are very supportive relationships and pupils feel confident to talk to adults. Pupils have a particularly good understanding of their personal development targets. They are proud of their successes and they like the way staff tell them how well they are doing in both their work and personal development. Pupils' achievements are celebrated in classroom assemblies at the end of each day. The information which is given to parents for annual review

meetings is of a high standard. Parents report a high degree of satisfaction with their level of involvement in their child's education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher shows outstanding leadership through her determination to maintain the highest standards of teaching and care. She is supported by a strong deputy. Curriculum coordinators have a good overview of provision in their subject and the effective way managers monitor, evaluate and improve on each aspect of the school's performance and pupils' achievements is a strength of the school. There are very effective and supportive procedures, for instance, to monitor and improve staff performance. Communication within the school is excellent. Staff feel fully consulted, involved and valued. There are excellent procedures to support new staff and the quality of professional training is outstanding. This makes a significant contribution to sustaining pupils' achievements.

The governing body provides effective support to the school. They have a clear knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. Relationships with parents are extremely good since communication between home and school is very well organised and parents are actively encouraged to be involved with their child's education.

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Inspection judgements

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

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

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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

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

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?	2
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

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

Inspection of Valley School, Whitehaven Road, Bramhall, Stockport,
SK7 1EN

Not long ago I came to the school to see how you were getting on and whether I could suggest anything to make the school better. You made me very welcome and I enjoyed meeting some of you in the classroom. Thank you and well done.

I was with you for two days. That was long enough for me to realise that you go to an outstandingly good school. I could see that you all enjoy school very much. There were lots of things that I liked. Here are a few.

- You work hard and make excellent progress in your work and in your personal development.
- The many different people at the school look after you very well.
- You are given an excellent range of activities, including those that help you become independent, make choices and mix with other pupils from different schools.
- You receive excellent teaching and your teachers and other staff are very good at recording all the progress you make, although they should make the information easier to understand.
- Your school is extremely well run by your headteacher who is very well supported by everyone else, including your parents.

I think the school could improve even further if it completes the update of the subjects on your timetables to help you make even better progress. You can help too, just by going on working as hard as you have been doing.

Please thank your parents for all the helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

Best wishes and good luck.