

Valley Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124120
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314816
Inspection date	31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Gerald Griffin

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	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Arthur Forrester
Headteacher	Valerie Slater
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2003
School address	School Drive Oakamoor Stoke-on-Trent ST10 3DQ
Telephone number	01538 702355
Fax number	01538 702355

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Valley Primary School is a small primary school. There are two mixed-age classes of predominantly White British heritage. Children's skills and experiences on entry to Reception are broadly average but vary from year to year. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average as is the percentage of pupils taking free school meals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Valley is a good school. Achievement is good and standards are above average. Children progress well in the lively Reception and pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' personal development is good and thrives in the school's happy environment. They are polite, confident and well behaved. Pupils enjoy school and feel very safe. They readily take responsibility as members of the school council and do their best to eat healthily and take plenty of exercise. The good leadership and management of the headteacher underpins the good quality of education provided by the school. However, she is not complacent, and her drive and determination to raise standards further is evident, for example, in improvements in the provision of information and communication technology (ICT).

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are interesting and work is challenging. As a result, pupils are keen to learn and work hard. Teachers plan work that matches the needs of mixed age classes well, which ensures children and pupils make good progress. Occasionally progress slows when the teacher's instructions are not clear enough and pupils are not sure what they have to do. The good curriculum supports pupils' personal development well. A good number of visits to places of interest, visitors to school and a variety of clubs broaden and enrich the curriculum. The outdoor learning area for children in Reception is not covered. This restricts its use and the opportunities for children to gain independence.

Parents' support for the school is overwhelming and they are rightly pleased with the quality of education. One parent represents the views of many writing, 'I am very happy with the care and teaching my son receives. He is making good progress in lessons and in his gaining of social skills'. The pastoral care provided for students is outstanding. Because the school is small, adults have a very detailed knowledge of the needs of every child and pupil and they use this to provide them with a high level of effective personal care and support. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from a well-structured programme that ensures they too make good progress. The academic guidance provided for pupils is variable. Marking and other feedback from teachers does not always provide enough detail on how pupils can improve their work.

Staff morale is high and they enthusiastically share the headteacher's drive to improve the quality of education provided. She is supported well by subject leaders and leadership and management is good overall. The school's record of improvements shows that the school is well placed to get even better.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress overall in the Reception group. Most children reach the expected levels by the time they start Year 1 and many exceed them. Best progress is made in social development because children are provided with many opportunities to share items and to talk, play and learn together. Teaching and learning are good and relationships in the stimulating classroom are happy and positive. The curriculum provides an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activity. The outdoor learning area is underused, especially in wet weather because it is open to the elements. This limits children's choice to work outdoors and their gaining of independence. Parents are happy with the well-structured measures that help children settle into school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers' instructions in lessons provide pupils with a clear understanding of what they are to do.
- Give pupils greater guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.
- Provide a covered outdoor learning area for children in Reception.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good overall, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Standards in English, mathematics and science are above average by Year 6, although they vary from year to year because of the small numbers involved.

Best progress is made in English. Pupils write longer pieces of work in a wide variety of styles such as letters, factual accounts and stories. Spelling and punctuation are generally accurate. Most pupils enjoy reading and read well. In mathematics pupils have a good understanding of number and shape and most can solve mathematical problems well. Pupils do not always display data accurately in graphs. Specialist teaching and good opportunities for practical work lead to above average standards in science. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have risen and are now above average because of pupils' improved access to computers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils respect each other, adults and the world around them. Their good behaviour is founded on a good understanding of right and wrong, although occasionally pupils do not listen attentively to what the teacher is saying. Pupils work well in groups and readily help each other in lessons and around school. They are respectful of people with religions and traditions different from their own.

Pupils report that there is no bullying. They largely know how to keep themselves safe, for example, when crossing the road and are aware of the dangers of drugs. Their understanding of how to keep safe while using the internet is less well developed. Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their above average attendance. They particularly like the visits out and participating in out of school clubs such as cooking. Most pupils take regular exercise and choose the healthy option at meal times. Pupils are keen to accept responsibility as playground buddies and are proud of the school council and the work it has undertaken to improve access to the school field. Pupils readily contribute to the wider community through fund raising and taking part in village events. Above average standards and their positive attitudes are preparing pupils well for secondary school and future employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers manage their classes well. Relationships are good and pupils enjoy learning. Teachers use a wide range of resources, games and puzzles to actively engage pupils and accelerate their progress. Teachers ensure work is challenging and this is especially developing pupils' good use of technical language. For example, a Year 1 pupil confidently used the word 'glossary' in her conversation in a literacy lesson. Progress sometimes slows when pupils are unclear about

what is expected of them because the teacher has not made instructions explicit enough. This means that learning time is lost while the teacher explains again what a task entails. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to learning especially for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Physical education, swimming and science lessons support aspects of pupils' personal development well. Well-structured assemblies and services in the local church enhance pupils' spiritual and moral development. Dance and music lessons and musical instrument tuition are broadening pupils' interest in the arts. There are many opportunities for pupils to meet their peers from other schools for activities, such as sports teams, that broaden and extend their learning experiences. The school recognises that there is scope to develop further this collaboration so that older pupils and gifted and talented pupils have more opportunities to learn with others. Pupils are making good use of the new computers to record and store the memories of senior citizens, as part of an engaging history project that will be lodged in the village archive. Wall displays are most informative and are used well by pupils as a learning resource.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are very well cared for and they can readily turn to an adult if they have a worry, confident that their concerns will be quickly and effectively resolved. The school provides effective and sympathetic support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they make similar good progress to their peers. The school works well with a broad range of outside agencies to support pupils' welfare and education. For example, speech therapists are training staff to effectively meet the specific needs of pupils who have speech difficulties. Health and safety and child protection measures are robust and regularly updated.

In English pupils have a very clear understanding of how they can improve their work. This comes through detailed marking, well focused discussions with teachers, and self-assessment against their challenging targets. This high level of guidance is not consistent in other subjects and, as a result, pupils are not always sure what precise action they must take to make their work better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Regular monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of its work provides the school with a largely accurate picture of its effectiveness, strengths and areas for development. This has led to many improvements. For example, providing more time for pupils to discuss their work and plan their writing has accelerated progress in English. However, school improvement plans are not always detailed enough to show the precise course of action to be taken. The school has challenging and realistic targets for pupils' achievement. Pupils' progress is regularly checked and any underachievement is spotted quickly. These pupils receive effective additional help so they catch up.

Subject leaders play a significant role in checking the school's performance and planning improvements in their areas. The leadership team work well to develop the skills of staff. For example, recent training has sharpened teaching assistants' skills so that they now provide effective challenge for pupils in discussions. The school uses resources well to make classes smaller so that pupils get more individual attention. This is most effective in the Reception and for older pupils in English and mathematics, where their class is divided into two groups.

Governors are very supportive and work hard on behalf of the school. They have a clear grasp of the standard of education the school provides. They understand data and to use it well to challenge the school rigorously over its performance.

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Annex A

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?	2
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
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?	2

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?	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

1 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Valley Primary School, Oakamoor, Staffordshire, ST10 3DQ

I enjoyed my visit to your school. You were very polite and friendly and you made me feel most welcome. I enjoyed the discussions I had with you about the work and activities you do at school. You clearly enjoy being in a small school in which you get on with each other and the adults very well. You are rightly proud of the school's happy atmosphere. Valley is a good school. Here are some of my findings:

- You make good progress throughout the school.
- The good teaching helps you to reach above average standards in English, mathematics and science.
- You really enjoy school and feel very safe and secure.
- You behave well.
- You have good relationships with your teachers and you work hard for them.
- The curriculum provides many activities that extend your ideas well.
- Adults in the school look after you very well.
- The headteacher leads the school well and teachers are working hard to make sure the school gets better.

I have asked the school to do three things to help it get even better:

- Make sure you are clear about what you have to do in lessons.
- Improve the outdoor learning area for children in Reception.
- Make sure you know how to make your work better.

You can help the school by continuing to behave well and trying your best in lessons.

I wish you all success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Gerald Griffin Lead inspector