

Valley Road Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133559
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	316151
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Andrea Lyons HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	405
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Geoff Dodds
Headteacher	Mrs Chris Young
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2003
School address	Corporation Road Hendon Sunderland SR2 8PL
Telephone number	0191 5537750
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Valley Road is a very large primary school which was formed in 2002 from the amalgamation of an infant and a junior school. In 2003, it moved into new, high specification premises, designed to enable the school to be the hub of services for the local community. It offers a range of extended services, and was designated a children's centre in January 2006. It is situated in an area of considerable social deprivation. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is more than double the national average. A significant number of pupils enter or leave the school during the course of the school year and many of these pupils have considerable social and educational needs. The school consistently includes a number of looked after children. The number of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities has risen sharply this year and is now well above the national average.

The number of pupils from a minority ethnic heritage has risen steadily to around half the national average. The number of pupils who have English as an additional language is around the national average. The number of pupils from a minority ethnic heritage has risen steadily and is now over half the national average. The school has a diverse population compared with many other schools in the local authority.

The school and extended services have received significant amounts of additional funding from a number of sources, primarily New Deal in the Community, known locally as 'Back on the Map'.

The Early Days Nursery is registered and managed by the governing body. It was inspected separately in 2005, when it was judged to be satisfactory.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Valley Road is a satisfactory school with good features, particularly in the care and support provided for pupils, their families and the community. The impact of the school's work on pupils' academic progress is less secure but is satisfactory overall.

The school has developed well in the five years since it opened and has a good capacity to improve further. It welcomes and supports all pupils, whatever their needs, together with their parents and members of the local community. The school sets out to be a hub of the community and is succeeding. The extended services offer good quality opportunities for learning and socialising, for example around family literacy. Although take-up is still limited, staff work hard to involve parents and those who attend benefit well. Within school, pupils' progress and behaviour are improved through the 'stepping stones' pre-school group and after school homework and breakfast clubs.

Staff are extremely committed to pupils and their families and provide exceptional care and support. The vast majority of parents have a very positive view of the school. Many wrote to the inspection team to praise the welcoming and helpful staff and to say how happy and settled their children are. A comment typical of many parents was: 'I am proud to say that my children go to this excellent school.'

Standards remain below the national average but are improving. The number of pupils reaching the expected levels at the end of Key Stage 2 is now satisfactory. Too few pupils reach the higher levels. Pupil progress varies greatly and is often reduced by poor attendance or disruption in pupils' lives, but overall it is satisfactory. Pupils often make good or outstanding progress in their social and language skills in the early years. Progress is slower in writing than in other subjects but is beginning to speed up.

Teaching is largely satisfactory with a number of good features. However, teaching is prevented from being consistently good because assessment of pupils' work is not sharp enough and information on individual pupil progress is not used effectively. Challenge for higher ability pupils is often insufficient.

The school effectively supports pupils' personal development and well-being so that they make great progress from when they started school. The school emphasises the development of pupils' social and communication skills and the success of this is seen in the good relationships and attitudes to work displayed by most pupils. Pupils' behaviour is generally satisfactory and sometimes good. Attendance however is unsatisfactory.

The governing body supports the school well with particular strengths in setting out a vision for the school and community. However, this has not yet translated into effective mechanisms to challenge the school sufficiently about the progress of pupils.

The headteacher provides inspirational leadership. She is very well supported by an extremely committed and skilled senior management team which effectively unites care, education and community work. Much of the school's success in supporting pupils and families is a result of the strong team spirit and commitment created by managers and staff. The school's self-evaluation is good but it suffers, as does the school's performance overall, from too great an emphasis on provision and standards rather than a sharp and consistent focus on pupils' progress.

The school has used its additional funding effectively to support the development of community links and a strong ethos of care and support through a high number of staff to pupils. This has contributed greatly to the school's high quality pastoral care and the good progress pupils make in their personal, social and communication development. The impact on pupils' academic progress is satisfactory.

Value for money is satisfactory. The school has managed the planned gradual reduction in funding well and there are a number of positive plans to ensure sustainability when the additional funding ceases in 2010. The school has worked hard on the issues identified by the last inspection with evidence of success in most areas, particularly in the overall aim of raising standards. Nevertheless, some areas such as attendance and writing continue to require improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage is good. Children start Nursery with a range of skills and abilities which can vary greatly within their cohorts and from year to year. Some pupils' personal, social and emotional skills are much less well developed than could be expected for their age. For many pupils, language acquisition is at an early stage and so pupils are new to early reading and writing activities.

Staff quickly identify children's individual needs and plan a range of specific activities to develop areas where they need to make up lost ground. They focus intensively on developing children's personal, social, emotional skills and their speaking and listening. Teachers and teaching assistants are very skilled in encouraging pupils to communicate. Children make outstanding progress in these areas, with most leaving the Foundation Stage with skills which are appropriate for their age. This gives them a very good start to begin to learn more formally. Children make good progress in most other areas of their development. However, children make satisfactory progress in their reading and writing skills. These remain below average on entry to Key Stage 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that school self-evaluation and planning focuses rigorously on the impact on pupils' progress.
- Improve attendance.
- Improve assessment, marking and tracking so as to improve progress for individual pupils.
- Increase the level of challenge for more able pupils.
- Improve the quality of writing across the school.

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

Standards are below the national average but progress is satisfactory. Progress and standards in writing are less good than in other subject areas.

Standards and achievement overall have shown an upward trend since the school was established. This reflects the school's continually improving provision and expertise. Within that pattern, standards and progress have been variable.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have been variable over time. From a high point of around the national average, standards fell in 2005 and 2006. This was because these pupils had entered school with skills which were much lower than the previous years. Unvalidated data from 2007 indicates that standards have now improved significantly.

Although standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are below the national average, they have improved greatly since the school first opened. In the first few years there was a slow but steady improvement. This accelerated markedly in 2006 when most pupils reached the expected levels. This was double the number of pupils who achieved these levels in the school's first year. Where standards are below the national average, this is often because fewer pupils reach the higher levels. Provisional results from 2007 indicate that this improvement is continuing. For the first time the school has met the minimum target set for all schools.

Progress can vary greatly across the school depending on a number of factors affecting the pupils' access to education. Where progress is less good, this is largely because significant groups of children have experienced considerable personal trauma, have not been at the school for a sufficient period of time, or are poor attenders. Progress is better for pupils who have attended the school throughout a Key Stage. For example, the first group of pupils who had attended Valley Road throughout their Key Stage 2 were judged to have made satisfactory progress in the national tests in 2006. This is also true of the 2007 cohort of pupils.

Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or English as an additional language, make satisfactory and sometimes good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and provides a good starting point for improving their academic achievement. Their behaviour is satisfactory and sometimes good. They are polite, friendly and work well together. Recently, an increasing number of pupils with significant behaviour problems have joined the school. Other pupils dislike this behaviour because this holds back their own learning and they show commendable maturity in ignoring it. A small number of older pupils can be defiant and aggressive. The school reviewed its behaviour policy promptly and effectively to meet this challenge with the result that behaviour improved overall.

Parents are pleased that children enjoy school. However, attendance is inadequate. The rate of unauthorised absences is about six times the national average. This is despite improvements in rates of attendance over the last three years. This is because a significant minority of pupils still have very low levels of attendance. The school, primarily through the excellent work of their Education Home Visitor, has been successful in working with families to improve the attendance of some pupils. However, the school's work to improve attendance is not always sufficiently supported by other agencies in following up referrals and using statutory powers.

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles, and enjoy sport and other physical activities. They value the school council, particularly the annual elections of councillors. School councillors talk very positively about their role in school. During the inspection they effectively led an assembly about ways to further improve life at the school which was extremely well received by all pupils.

Although pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills are below average, they are improving. Their personal and social skills support the likelihood of achieving economic well-being in the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and sometimes good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are well structured with a range of activities. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils contribute greatly to pupils' ability to learn. Where teaching is good, children are focused on the task, involved in practical activities, have meaningful examples upon which to model their work and are effectively supported by teaching assistants. Where lessons are less effective, tasks are not always well matched to different pupils' abilities. The quality of teaching is therefore inconsistent between year groups and some lessons are not challenging enough for higher ability children.

In the best lessons, teachers question pupils skilfully and reinforce learning so that pupils make satisfactory and often good progress in individual lessons. However, pupils do not always know what they need to do next to improve because high quality assessment and marking is not used consistently. Tracking and assessing children's progress is in place but is not used effectively to identify levels of achievement for particular pupils and inform teachers' planning. This reduces the impact of otherwise good teaching, and means that pupils' progress is not maintained consistently between lessons. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are engaged in a wide range of intervention strategies to help them achieve. Assessment and target setting for these pupils is good and as a result, they make consistently satisfactory and often good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has recently been enriched and extended to remedy gaps in many pupils' understanding. It emphasises first hand experience of the world through practical activities and visits to local amenities. This is supported by whole school themes planned to include all areas of the curriculum. This is having a positive effect on pupils' interest in lessons and ability to relate their experience to their learning. There is careful planning for literacy across the curriculum. For example, stories are used well to support circle time and teachers reinforce key skills such as phonics in many lessons. The school has recently introduced a specific focused daily session on basic skills for all pupils which is already showing good results. Interactive whiteboards are used well in class by both teachers and pupils, even the very youngest, and there is good use of information and communication technology across the curriculum.

Children attend a wide range of out of school clubs. This enhances their experiences and self-confidence.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The overall care, guidance and support for the school is good and, within that, pastoral care is outstanding. Staff know pupils and families very well and work with a range of support agencies to help with any difficulties they experience. The school is a safe and secure place for pupils who often experience considerable difficulties in their daily life and is valued as such by pupils and parents. Some parents telephoned inspectors particularly to discuss this, and a typical comment was, 'It's a really caring school'.

Appropriate arrangements for safeguarding pupils are in place. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that if there are any problems they will be dealt with.

Guidance and support for pupils' academic progress is satisfactory. Teachers' marking is supportive and encouraging, but often does not tell pupils how to improve their work. Pupils do not always know what their targets are and what they need to do next in order to reach them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership, management and governance of the school are good. The vision of the headteacher and the governing body is clear and ambitious and shared by all staff. They have made outstanding progress in establishing strong links with the local community and in providing high quality pastoral care. These both benefit pupils' social and academic progress. There are good arrangements for staff to take responsibility for key areas and the school is run very effectively on a day to day basis. There are challenging targets to raise standards for individuals and groups of learners so that they attain the expected standards at the end of Key Stage 2. There is a strong team spirit and enormous commitment to continually developing the provision offered to the pupils, their families and the community. Monitoring and evaluation of the quality of provision and its impact on raising standards is good. As a result, staff continually refine the curriculum activities and personal support they offer for groups of pupils. This results in many strengths in the school and its continuing improvement. However, the school's leaders do not sufficiently analyse the effect of all its considerable input on individual pupil progress.

Parents' positive view of the school is reflected in its good reputation locally. It is increasing the number of pupils attending from areas outside the immediate catchment area.

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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?	3
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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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?	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	4
The behaviour of learners	3
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?	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	1
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	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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

21 November 2007

Dear Children,

Inspection of Valley Road Community Primary School, Sunderland SR2 8PL

Thank you for welcoming us to your school when we came to inspect it recently. You were all very polite and friendly and we enjoyed meeting you. Thank you for showing us around the school and for telling us what you think about your school. You told us that you always feel safe at school and that all the adults look after you well. We agree with this.

We think that your school is a satisfactory school which has many good things about it. Firstly Mrs Young and all the staff work incredibly hard to care for you and sometimes people in your families too. We feel that the pastoral care and support they give you is outstanding. The school plays a big part in your local community, through things like groups for parents and the Hive, the breakfast club and the 'stepping stones' pre-school group. This part of the school's work is outstanding too.

The school has done really well to improve the results that children get at the end of Year 6. The number of children who get Level 4 has doubled since the school was set up. Well done to everyone! You make satisfactory progress in your work but you could still do better, and all the staff will keep on helping you to do this. They know how incredibly important it is for you to enjoy your learning and do well in life and they are going to keep on trying to improve. We have asked them to:

- improve your attendance
- improve your writing
- improve the way they mark your work so that you know what you need to do next to improve.
- provide harder work for pupils who can do it.

You can help by trying hard with all your work, especially your writing. But the most important thing of all is something only you and your families can do. This is to improve your attendance. The school can really help and care for you, but it can't do that if you're not there! So you need to make sure that you get to school every day unless you are really ill. Can you do that?

Your school will be inspected again at some time in the next three years. We hope that by the time of the next inspection you are all attending very well and have tried hard with all your work. Well done for your success so far, and keep going on to even more success!

With all best wishes

Andrea Lyons

Her Majesty's Inspector