

Valley Gardens Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108636
Local Authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	324810
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Elaine Colquhoun

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	743
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Grayson
Headteacher	Mr Michael Homer
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005
School address	Valley Gardens Whitley Bay Tyne and Wear NE25 9AQ
Telephone number	0191 2008792
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Valley Gardens is a larger than average school which is oversubscribed. The school caters for pupils from Year 5 to Year 8. This means pupils join the school half way through Key Stage 2 and leave after their first two years in Key Stage 3. Most pupils attending the school come from the local community and live in areas of social advantage. Almost all of the pupils are White British and there are very few from different ethnic backgrounds. The proportions entitled to free school meals or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are low compared with the national average. The school has gained numerous awards including Artsmark Gold, International Schools Award, Sportsmark and Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Valley Gardens Middle is a good school with some outstanding features, in particular the personal development of the pupils and the curriculum. Strong leadership by the headteacher resolutely steers the school to success. There is a commitment to raising standards and improving outcomes and opportunities for pupils.

Standards are above average and pupils achieve well from their starting points in Year 5. However, in mathematics, a small minority of pupils in Years 5 and 6 make slower progress than that normally expected. The school recognises this and has begun to implement strategies for improvement, although these are at an early stage.

The personal development of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are confident, courteous and their behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Learners enjoy school and their attendance is above average.

Pupils achieve well because of good teaching and effective guidance. Assessment of pupils' progress is rigorous and teachers use the data produced well, when planning work for their classes. Teachers have good subject knowledge and ensure a swift pace to lessons. The marking of pupils' work is effective in guiding pupils on how they can improve. However, some opportunities are missed in lessons in the development of pupils' independent learning skills.

The curriculum is outstanding due to the excellent provision for pupils' personal development and the very good opportunities for able pupils to make faster progress in mathematics. Pupils benefit greatly from the excellent programme of additional activities, including sport, music and residential visits.

The care, guidance and support for the individual needs of pupils is good and potential barriers to pupils' learning are tackled successfully. Monitoring of pupils' progress leads to targeted intervention. This is provided by placing pupils in 'sets' for lessons in some subjects, according to their ability and by individual mentoring for those pupils experiencing personal difficulties. These strategies have a positive impact on improving rates of progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

Leadership and management are good. The promotion of community cohesion is good. There are very good links with a number of other schools and activities involving the local and wider community and pupils enjoy a number of residential visits during their time at school including visits abroad. There has been continued improvement since the previous inspection. The school identifies its strengths and weaknesses accurately and has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning to promote more opportunities for the development of pupils' independent learning skills.
- Strengthen intervention in mathematics in Key Stage 2 for those who are slow to make progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average. Pupils make good progress overall and achieve well. By the time they leave middle school at the end of Year 8, standards are above

average. In English and science pupils do well in both key stages and standards are above average in Year 6 and Year 8. In mathematics pupils' progress is less even.

In mathematics the school's own assessments at the start of Year 5 identify some weaknesses in some pupils' mathematical skills. By the end of Year 6 satisfactory progress is made overall. Pupils make very good progress by the time they leave in Year 8. The school has put effective strategies into place to raise the progress in mathematics. At Key Stage 3 two thirds of each year group are set into groups to accelerate their progress in mathematics. In Year 8 pupils take national tests that are usually taken in Year 9. Many pupils reach exceptionally high standards. For those not on the accelerated programme, effective intervention programmes ensure very effective progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils enjoy school. They are very enthusiastic learners and enjoy lessons, particularly where they take an active part or are learning independently. A high proportion of pupils take part in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities. The above average attendance is a reflection of pupils' positive commitment to school activities and learning.

Pupils have a very clear understanding of right and wrong. They enjoy moral debate and their writing on moral issues, such as whether to 'tell' on a friend, reflects considerable depth of thought. Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils act maturely in and around the school. Pupils very much appreciate the positive relationships they have with staff and each other and are sensitive towards each other's needs and feelings.

Pupils demonstrate a very strong commitment to staying healthy. High numbers participate in sporting activities and many bike or walk to school. Pupils appreciate the good range of healthy foods at lunchtime and know how to eat sensibly. Pupils feel very safe in school. They are very well briefed on how stay safe, for instance when using information and communication technology (ICT). Bullying is extremely rare and pupils know who to go to if there is a problem. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to their own school community and the wider community. The very active school council communicates well with pupils, staff and governors. They have contributed to staff appointments and have successfully negotiated the supply of new bike sheds. Pupils take their leadership roles within the school very seriously. For example, Year 8 pupils competently lead Year 6 classes through energetic weekly programmes of exercise. Pupils are highly committed to charitable fundraising. They often take the initiative in organising fundraising events for causes and projects in Britain, Europe and Africa. Pupils have an excellent awareness of a wide range of cultures. The Comenius project has brought pupils into close contact with people from a diverse range of nations. Pupils gain a good understanding of a range of faith groups in this country. Pupils make excellent progress in developing leadership and enterprise skills. These, alongside well developed basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT prepare them well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Typically, very good relationships and behaviour create a positive learning environment where a good pace and pupil enjoyment are evident. Good levels of challenge and high expectations ensure good progress in lessons. Clear lesson objectives are shared with pupils. Pupils understand them and they support the clear focus for teaching and learning in lessons. Pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning.

Effective questioning encourages pupils to develop their understanding, to reflect and draw on their prior learning, and share this with others. ICT is used effectively to enhance pupils' learning. For example, pupils prepared news articles and presented their views very competently on local television and radio stations. Support staff provide effective support because they are well briefed by the teacher and understand the objectives of the lesson.

In the best lessons, assessment is shared well with pupils. They are encouraged to set their own targets and assess their progress towards achieving them. The informative marking system enhances pupils' understanding of their strengths and identifies clear developmental points. In these lessons a good range of learning activities tailored to individuals' interests and needs enables pupils to follow a more personalised learning route and enhances pupils' learning and their independence skills. However, in some lessons activities are not always as closely tailored as they might be to pupils' different learning needs. Some staff do not capitalise fully on pupils' positive attitudes and maturity to develop the skills of independent learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. The blend of subject specialist teaching with effective primary school practice provides a wide variety of curriculum activities which engages pupils very well and provides a stimulating learning environment. The accelerated mathematics programme for most Key Stage 3 pupils and the effective support for others are resoundingly successful and promote good progress. Citizenship and personal and social education underpin pupils' excellent personal development. Pupils are full of praise for the enjoyable and often exciting opportunities in lessons, through enrichment activities and in extra-curricular clubs and sports. Those with particular gifts and talents speak with glee of the fun they have in school productions and in athletic activities. The vibrant curriculum is sustained by the way teaching and support staff readily seize opportunities to make learning direct and active. Pupils are involved in visits away from school (including abroad), by welcoming visitors and through charitable and community action. There is good development of links between subjects. With the vigorous commitment of staff, the school provides a wealth of out-of-hours experiences that are very well subscribed and much enjoyed. For example, many pupils participate in a wide range of the sporting activities and many older boys love the possibilities offered by the art club. Meanwhile, newspaper cuttings and photographs attest to a plethora of wide ranging and stimulating events and successes in recent years.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. A strong commitment to inclusion is evident and all pupils are involved in the life of the school. A variety of additional support provides well for those pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good systems are in place to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety. Safeguarding, child protection arrangements and risk assessments are robust and fully meet requirements.

The school has effective transition arrangements and Year 8 pupils feel well prepared for their move to high school. The school council provides opportunities for pupils to have a voice and influence aspects of particular concern. For example, they worked in partnership with catering staff and were influential in developing healthier school lunches. The breakfast club for pupils from Years 5 and 6 provides a good range of activities and a healthy breakfast. The systems for tracking pupils' progress are good and they are used to good effect in all subjects. Pupils are aware of and understand their current levels and targets. In some subjects, for example science and design technology, pupils are encouraged to assess and set targets for their own work. Consequently, pupils feel they are well informed, not only about how well they are doing but also about how to make progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Leadership at all levels has ensured that the school has made good improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher's leadership is robust and determined. Together with the senior leaders he has a clear vision for the school which is communicated very effectively to all staff. Good leadership has improved teaching and learning and the curriculum. Standards are rising and achievement is now good. This has impacted on the excellent personal development of the pupils. The school's relentless focus on raising standards and achievement has been well supported by staff at all levels and standards continue to rise. Pupils feel very well cared for and secure within a harmonious school community. Community cohesion is good and is actively and effectively promoted both within school and the wider community. Governors ensure that statutory requirements are met and provide good support and challenge to the school, ensuring that there is a constant drive to improve standards. There has been continued improvement since the previous inspection. The school identifies its strengths and weaknesses accurately and has good capacity to improve further.

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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 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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	2
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?	2

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

12 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Valley Gardens Middle School, North Tyneside, NE25 9AQ

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you very much for making us feel so welcome when we inspected your school. We enjoyed talking to you. I thought you might like to know what we thought about your school.

It is a good school with some outstanding features. These are its strengths.

- The school is a happy place to be and you enjoy being there.
- You work hard and are making good progress in your work.
- You do outstandingly well in your personal development and your behaviour is excellent.
- The curriculum is very good and you enjoy the many activities the school provides, including the after-school clubs, particularly in sport.
- You are well looked after and staff do their best to make sure your lessons are interesting and fun.
- The school is well led and managed.

The headteacher and the senior team know how to improve the school. We have asked them to focus on improving.

- The way that the staff organise their lessons in order to increase your independent learning and skills.
- The work given in mathematics for those pupils in Years 5 and 6 who are making less progress than others.

You can help them by continuing to do your best and making the most of all the opportunities the school provides for you.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly. We wish you every success.

Yours faithfully

Elaine Colquhoun

Lead inspector