

Vale First and Middle School, Worthing

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125865
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	340857
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Janet Simms

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

Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	647
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Jenkins
Headteacher	Martin Garratt
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. They observed 29 lessons or parts of lessons taught by 22 teachers. Inspectors held discussions with senior and middle leaders, with some teaching staff, the bursar and with a governor. They talked to groups of pupils formally and with many others in lessons and at play. Inspectors attended various other activities such as a singing assembly, Year 7's 'Café 80's' enterprise activity and part of the First School sports morning. They scrutinised much school documentation, including minutes of governors' meetings, advisors' recent reports, school development plans, pupils' assessment and tracking records, documents related to safeguarding, attendance data and records of the monitoring of teaching. They analysed 166 parents' and carers' questionnaires and those from staff and pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. Inspectors looked in detail at the following:

- pupils' progress in English, particularly in writing
- the capacity of new leadership to promote and sustain improvement
- all aspects of provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- whether different groups of pupils progress equally well across the school.

Information about the school

This is a large school where there are more pupils in older year groups than in younger ones because of a change in admission numbers. The large majority stay into Year 7, but some leave at Year 6. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average; the largest percentage of these pupils have needs which relate to language and communication. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds and speak English as a first language. A new headteacher took up his post two months before the inspection. At the time of inspection, the Early Years Foundation Stage leader was on long-term leave and the headteacher had taken responsibility for managing this phase. The school holds Artsmark silver award amongst its awards and accreditations.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. There are good features, which include pupils' attainment and progress in mathematics and many aspects of their behaviour and personal development. Senior staff and governors now evaluate strengths and areas for development accurately and the staff team is working effectively to bring about improvement. The school is very popular in the local community and amongst parents and carers. The new headteacher has galvanised staff and is already creating improvements in areas such as the school's decaying infrastructure, pupils' learning environment, and the curriculum, making it more lively and engaging. Additionally, staff are building successfully on improvements which were already underway, such as positive trends in writing across the school and some provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The issue from the school's last inspection, which related to progress in mathematics and writing for average ability pupils in Years 3 to 6, has been tackled effectively. These improvements, together with renewed vigour and enthusiasm amongst managers and other staff, and more effective challenge from governors, demonstrate that the school has satisfactory capacity to sustain improvements.

The profile of skills levels on entry has gradually fallen, so competences amongst children entering Reception now are generally typical for their age. When older pupils entered Reception, and in their tests at Year 2, standards were somewhat higher. Attainment is above average at Years 6 and 7 and, with the exception of English last year, pupils make satisfactory progress. Weaknesses in writing accounted for lower attainment and progress in English. These were analysed accurately and successful interventions have resulted in improved attainment in English this year. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but includes a range from good to inadequate. Good teaching observed led to lively, active learning in a range of subjects. In weaker lessons, progress was too slow, particularly for more able pupils, and learning dull. Accurate leadership judgements about teaching have rightly identified the need to match provision in lessons more precisely to the needs of all pupils. Teachers' marking does not always give clear enough guidance to pupils on how to improve their work. Although pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities often make good progress in withdrawal or intervention groups, their specific needs, and those of more able pupils, are less well met in full class lessons where their progress is slower.

Governors and managers have drawn up good new plans for improvement recently, some of which have begun but not yet had time to show impact. Changes to the curriculum are already showing good effects in enthusing staff and pupils, with more reforms due in the autumn. Most staff are responding positively to new procedures for monitoring and evaluation and the openness these bring to the school, but it is too early

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to evaluate the impact of these new systems. Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory, although leaders recognise the urgent need to address issues relating to leadership, planning and the provision and use of resources.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate all pupils' rates of progress by
 - creating greater consistency in the quality of teaching across the school, particularly in relation to matching work in whole-class lessons more closely to pupils' needs, abilities and prior performance
 - providing higher quality written marking which gives pupils specific advice about how to improve their work.
- improve provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - creating stability in the leadership and management of this phase
 - developing all planning, but specifically lesson planning, so that learning intentions for each activity are clear and adults know exactly what each child is intended to learn and how
 - improving all resources, particularly the outside environment and the deployment of adults when managing outdoor learning and safety, in order to accelerate children's progress in knowledge and understanding of the world
 - ensuring that recent improvement in provision for communication, language and literacy, especially writing, continues.
- Develop the school's capacity and skills in monitoring and evaluation, particularly senior and middle managers' observations of teaching and learning, and provision of developmental critique and feedback.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Learning and achievement are satisfactory overall, though the school recognises inconsistencies in rates of progress between groups and classes. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, developing into confident, friendly, well-motivated young people. They feel safe, valuing recent improvements in security.

Early analysis of issues in writing led to improvements to the curriculum and in the teaching of writing, which have resulted in notably better progress at all stages this year. Year 6 attainment in English is higher than in 2009 because writing standards are now more in line with pupils' reading, which has been consistently strong. In Year 2 literacy lessons, a good variety of activity, including the enjoyable use of drama and other group work, stimulated pupils' descriptive writing and led to good progress. Informative displays reinforced the learning of adjectives well, and pupils' self- and peer-assessment added a strong dimension to learning. Similar pupils' involvement in assessment in Year 5 literacy lessons contributed to good learning about how to start sentences in imaginative ways. Good progress in mathematics results from strong

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subject knowledge and enthusiasm amongst staff. The mathematics curriculum makes very clear links with the 'real world' so pupils undertake tasks which help them with real-life problems. This makes learning enjoyable and meaningful. Good mathematics lessons showed Year 6 planning quantities and costs of food and drinks for class picnics, and in Year 7, pupils successfully tackled all the associated mathematical tasks involved in running successful caf s this week for their enterprise activities. These skills, together with strong personal development, provide a good basis for pupils' future education and working life. The unhelpful location of computers limits the development of information and communication technology skills, which are satisfactory.

Aspects of pupils' spiritual, social and moral development are strong, but they have limited experience of the diversity of multicultural communities in the United Kingdom. Learning of other cultural aspects such as art is good, particularly of painting and other two-dimensional skills, and pupils learn to sing well. They keep healthy and fit, combining a sensible competitive spirit with valuing all sporting participation. This was evident during the inspection when the girls' cricket team won a trophy.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Managers have accurately identified common aspects of teaching in need of improvement, such as marking, and personalising work to match individuals' or groups' needs, and these are improving gradually. Likewise, training and support are strengthening some individual practice. Classroom displays, and those around school, have improved recently, creating more stimulating environments. Lesson planning now includes identification of learning intentions, though these are not always referred to much in the course of the lesson. New projects and topics in the curriculum are more up-to-date, diverse and more flexibly attuned to staff and pupils' interests. Where teaching is weakest, an unenthusiastic, lacklustre approach provides too little opportunity for active learning, so pupils' attention drifts, though these examples are few. Usually, relationships between pupils and adults and between pupils are good, leading to enjoyable learning. These aspects are much valued by parents, carers and pupils, who also value the school for its strong pastoral care. However, a few minor gaps in security were identified; staff responded rapidly and effectively when this was brought to their attention.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory The new headteacher has made a good start, implementing strong, increasingly successful measures, procedures and systems to reverse an acknowledged decline in provision and outcomes. New expectations place higher demands on senior staff, who are often starting from a base of limited experience, and they are rising enthusiastically to the challenges of greater accountability. Most staff are relishing fresh opportunities and the challenges involved in improving the school, feeling empowered as they expand their roles and responsibilities. New impetus is speeding up improvements which began earlier, as staff take pride in perceptible improvements, in writing for instance. Governors hold managers to account effectively, and development priorities are the right ones to move the school forward. Key to this is a commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils, including investments in under-resourced areas such as the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents and carers play an increasingly important role in shaping the school, as do other partnerships. Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory, with good checks on personnel. The school is an orderly, cohesive community internally, and with the adjacent children's and family centre, plays a key role in local community cohesion. Global Week was

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successful in developing pupils' understanding of international community cohesion, and their feedback shows they would enjoy more of this. The school acknowledges the need to expand pupils' experience of cultural diversity within the United Kingdom.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Early Years Foundation Stage provision and outcomes for children are satisfactory. Skills are broadly in line with typical expectations when they enter and children make satisfactory progress from their different starting points. In some areas, such as personal, social and emotional development, progress is good. Children become confident, suitably independent and sociable, looking forward to moving into Year 1. They feel safe and enjoy their learning. A small minority of more able children do not make as much progress as they could, partly because of limited resources, particularly in the outside environment. This limits all children's development in knowledge and understanding of the world. Otherwise, the balance of curriculum opportunities such as child-initiated and adult-led activities is satisfactory. Provision has improved children's early writing skills and many were observed writing in different situations inside and out, with lots of role play and other stimulus to write about. The quality of the environment between classrooms, and between indoors and outdoors, is inconsistent, which affects children's outcomes in some areas of learning. The constraints of the outdoor space, for instance, limit creative and physical development. Assessment is satisfactory, but does not always inform planning, which consequently does not always take sufficient account of all children's needs. Learning intentions for activities, groups and individuals are often

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unclear, so gaps in learning are not always identified and this slows children's progress. The headteacher, as the current phase leader, has a clear and accurate view of priorities, but the Early Years Foundation Stage has lacked sufficient investment to keep abreast of current best practice, so there is much ground to make up. Given the complexity of the improvements required, the school recognises that stability in the leadership of this phase is a priority. Adults work hard to fulfil current requirements and succeed in creating an environment where good relationships are a key strength underpinning satisfactory learning and good personal development.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents and carers are extremely pleased with almost all aspects of provision and outcomes for their children. Several additional comments cite specific praise for individual teachers, who parents and carers feel have influenced their children's lives positively and profoundly. Several commented on the early positive impact of the new headteacher. A few mentioned concerns that more able pupils could be progressing better, and here inspectors and the school agree with parents and carers. Inspectors discussed with managers areas where a very small minority disagree with questions posed - dealing with unacceptable behaviour, and taking account of their concerns - though few mentioned behaviour specifically in additional comments. Pupils also express concerns about behaviour in their questionnaire responses. Managers agree that the management of behaviour may not be completely consistent between staff and agreed to strengthen this consistency. However, inspectors found behaviour to be good. The new headteacher held meetings with all groups of parents and carers early in his tenure to find out their views of the school. As a result, the school took prompt action on some immediately resolvable areas such as changing facilities for physical education, so separate changing spaces are now available for boys and for girls in Years 5, 6 and 7. The rationale behind class groupings has also been made clearer, though a few parents and carers remain concerned about this. Inspectors judge that the school pays proper attention to parents' and carers' concerns, and other parents and carers agree that communication has recently improved even further.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Vale First and Middle School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	94	61	56	36	2	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	88	57	62	40	2	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	60	39	76	51	14	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	85	55	61	40	7	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	92	60	59	38	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	66	43	73	47	11	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	55	36	91	59	5	3	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	69	45	74	48	4	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	72	47	75	49	6	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	50	32	81	53	15	10	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	49	32	80	52	16	10	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	62	40	86	66	4	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	96	62	82	34	5	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



15 July 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Vale First and Middle School, Worthing BN14 0DB

I am writing to thank you for your very kind and considerate welcome when we came to your school for the inspection and to tell you what we found out. Yours is a satisfactory school, with several really good things about it. These include your behaviour, your positive attitudes towards learning and the good relationships you enjoy with adults and with each other. You all take good care of each other and adults take care of you well. It was pleasing to see you all helping each other to learn. You learn mathematics well and we were delighted to see how much your writing has improved. Your standards are above average by the time you leave the school, especially in English and mathematics, but also in areas like art.

Some lessons are good and we saw you enjoying lots of good learning, especially in activities like the environmental design and technology projects in Years 3 and 4. Learning is not always so enjoyable for you, however, so we have asked the school to make all lessons as good as the best. We have asked adults to provide different types of work for each of you, to help all of you to progress better. We have also asked them to mark your work with more information to tell you what to do to improve it. We feel sure you will all help with this by reading this advice carefully, so that you can help yourselves to improve even more. You may find that there are more adults in classes observing your lessons, because we have asked them to check often that all your learning is improving.

We have also asked the school to make lots of different improvements in the Reception Year. Senior staff know they need to do these things and have already started on them, because they have made good decisions about what the school needs to do to improve.

Thank you again for your welcome.

Yours sincerely

Janet Simms

Lead inspector

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