

# Valley Park Community School

## Inspection report

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131245
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	341117
<b>Inspection dates</b>	26–27 April 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Sutherland-Harper

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1041
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	130
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Judi Taylor
<b>Headteacher</b>	Vic Ashdown, Phil Limbert (Executive Headteacher)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 April 2010
<b>School address</b>	Huntsman Lane Maidstone ME14 5DT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01622 679421
<b>Fax number</b>	01622 661671
<b>Email address</b>	vashdown@valleypark.kent.sch.uk

---

<b>Age group</b>	11–18
<b>Inspection dates</b>	26–27 April 2010
<b>Inspection number</b>	341117

---

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2010

## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Approximately half of the time was spent looking at students' learning. Inspectors visited 32 lessons taught by 32 different teachers. Meetings were held with staff, governors and groups of students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documentation, including the school's development plan, the school improvement partner's notes, minutes of governors' meetings, policies and data about students' attainment and progress. The team analysed the responses to 295 questionnaires returned by parents and carers in addition to those completed by staff and students.

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

- evidence to show that the overall standard of teaching has improved since the last inspection and that all students are suitably challenged
- the impact of improvements to Sixth Form provision since the last inspection
- the effectiveness of the school's use of data to provide for all students, especially girls, boys in English and mathematics and those with moderate learning difficulties
- the role of middle managers, especially in securing accountabilitythe impact of the expressive arts specialism on the school's provision for individuals and groups of students.

## Information about the school

Valley Park Community School is an average size secondary school, with most students coming from the immediate locality. The very large majority are of White British heritage, with a small number of students from minority ethnic groups. Few students speak English as an additional language and the proportion eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average and many of these have moderate learning difficulties. The school has specialist status in the expressive arts. It works in partnership with a neighbouring grammar school with a shared executive headteacher. The school has achieved Artsmark Gold and Extended Schools status and has Foundation status.

**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?**

**1**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

## Main findings

This is an outstanding school because outcomes for individuals and groups of students are good and improving and the school's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding. The school has a strong belief that every student can succeed. Teaching and the sixth form have improved since the last inspection and other important aspects of the school's work are outstanding. For example, care, guidance and support and an innovative curriculum are all increasingly tailored to the needs of individual students and give them every opportunity to reflect their strengths. As one parent, typifying the views of others, put it, 'Our daughter loves this school. She tries hard and gets good results.'"

Students' achievement is good, due to teaching which is now consistently good or better. The school's development of focused support and intervention, based on data analysis, ensures that the curriculum is effective for all learners. Attainment has improved since the last inspection; after a dip in 2008, the school took prompt action to identify the reasons and to put measures in place to ensure improved outcomes. As a result, the school achieved its highest ever GCSE results in 2009 when attainment was above average. Students are achieving at similar levels this year. Support and intervention strategies ensure that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good academic and personal progress. Occasionally, however, teachers' planning does not take full account of learners' needs or include enough opportunities for independent learning, and their progress slows as a result.

Students' behaviour is excellent. They are proud of their school and help to ensure that it is immaculately maintained. Students' understanding of equality and diversity is excellent and this is evident in the everyday life of the school. There are not always sufficient opportunities for students to take a more active part in leading and preparing the future of the school. The school is aware of this and has plans in place to develop student roles in this area.

A key factor in the school's progress is the success of leadership in embedding ambition and driving improvement. The headteacher and his team, and the executive headteacher, are focused on attaining the highest outcomes, illustrated by the goal of being designated as a world-class school within five years. Since the last inspection, the school has made excellent progress in tackling the key areas for development, as evidenced by the rising trend of results and an increased role for middle managers. The school's specialism, linked to the fast-developing vocational programme, has raised the school's profile and helped drive improvement forward. The leadership team is now working with determination to raise the quality of teaching even more. Self-assessment is highly evaluative and focused strategies are based on close monitoring of progress.

**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

The school's capacity to improve, as evidenced by a rising trend in results and improvements in the Sixth Form, is outstanding.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning to enable students to make even better progress by:
  - ensuring that planning of lessons takes full account of the needs and abilities of all students
  - increasing opportunities for dialogue between teachers and students and between students in order to encourage more extended responses in order to consolidate learning.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

The school expects all students to meet the challenge set by clear and ambitious targets. Attainment on entry is below average but rising. Clear targets relating to improvement ensure that students are keen to achieve well. Since the last inspection, Key Stage 4 standards have risen dramatically due to the combination of careful monitoring, better teaching and improved curriculum pathways. Students made much better progress in 2009 and results were significantly above average for almost all groups of students. The success rate for 5 A\*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent and including English and mathematics exceeded school predictions. Attainment in vocational subjects is high, with distinctions significantly above national averages and increasing uptake. Programmes such as the accelerated reading programme at Key Stage 3 ensure that all students are able to make the best progress possible.

Learning and progress are good with a strong focus on work in lessons. Relationships and behaviour are excellent. Students enjoy learning, especially when the subject is related to their fields of interest, and work together well. Occasionally, work is not well enough matched to students' abilities and there are not enough opportunities for extended contributions to lessons. Girls perform as well as boys. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, as do those who speak English as an additional language. Attendance is improving because of whole-school strategies, close monitoring and the engaging curriculum.

Students say they feel very safe at school. They treat each other with respect. Specialist status has provided more opportunities for them to develop appreciation of spiritual, social, and cultural differences. Bullying is rare and racist incidents equally so. If such episodes occur, the school takes them very seriously and deals with them promptly. Students understand the need to keep healthy. Uptake for extra-curricular and sporting activities is strong and contributes to students' good understanding of healthy lifestyles.'

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

**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

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

## How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good and occasionally inspirational.<sup>1</sup> Relationships are very strong in classes because students are engaged with the subject, enjoy learning and are keen to achieve. As a result of good pace and appropriate challenge, they are on task. Classes are managed well with positive behaviour and attitudes.<sup>1</sup> Expectations are clear and assessment strategies are effective with good peer and self assessment. Most teachers make good use of technology and other resources to develop students' understanding. A full range of information available about students' prior achievement helps with planning. Often, dialogue between teachers and students is very positive. Occasionally, where pupils are more passive learners, opportunities to extend their learning are fewer. Questioning is used well to ensure understanding but opportunities for extended answers are less frequent. Nevertheless, independent learning is increasingly built into lessons.

The curriculum is outstanding. It is expanding in response to student needs and skills and is enhancing opportunities. Clearer pathways with a strong vocational element are well matched to student needs and aspirations. The accelerated reading scheme with large take-up in Key Stage 3 is successfully developing literacy skills; school monitoring shows an impact on learning and progress now reflected in results. The expressive arts specialism provides memorable experiences for students whilst the emphasis on creativity informs planning across the school. Increasing student engagement with the

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

**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

curriculum has resulted in improved achievement. To supplement the curriculum, a range of enrichment opportunities have high student participation rates.

Care, guidance and support for students is exemplary. Effective use of prior attainment data ensures targeted and personalised support linked to different learning pathways. This has resulted in excellent provision for students, including potentially vulnerable members of the community. Transition between key stages is very well organised and students are guided and advised effectively. For example, students with learning difficulties choose subjects where they will be successful via access to a range of agencies.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The senior team has developed an ambitious vision based on high expectations, which is now shared by all members of the school community. Leaders use rigorous monitoring to identify individual needs and ensure that all students make at least good progress. There is no discrimination; the same opportunities are open to all. Tailored provision means little variation in outcomes for different groups. All students are fully integrated. Since the last inspection, the school has ceaselessly sought to improve. The expressive arts specialism involves large numbers of students in different ways. Middle leaders feel increasingly empowered and developed as the school has defined their roles more precisely. The school has put in place a programme of middle leadership development. Middle managers meet regularly to review progress across the school and how that fits into the whole-school vision. Self-evaluation is rigorous and leaders have a realistic picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The monitoring of teaching and learning has led to improvement but the school is determined to do even better. Experienced governors share the headteacher's vision. The chair of governors is working actively to extend links into the world of work so students are fully prepared for their future after school. Governors have robust systems for helping the school develop effectively, as in the close review of finances.

The school works well with other organisations, through federation with the neighbouring grammar school, with local schools through specialist status and with external academic partners. Safeguarding is exemplary because there is a comprehensive awareness of safeguarding issues among all those involved in the school. The school makes a strong contribution to community cohesion at local and

**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

national levels and leaders are now working on developing the international dimension, following an audit and action plan."''

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

Sixth form students make good progress from their different starting points and increasing numbers complete their courses. Applications for entry are increasing. Key issues highlighted at the last inspection have been addressed. The assistant headteacher with responsibility for the sixth form has worked effectively to ensure that expectations for staff and students are clear and high. The sixth form area has been redeveloped and there is better continuity of provision for those following vocational as well as academic courses from Key Stage 4. Outcomes for the current sixth form cohort have significantly improved due to close monitoring and appropriate programmes. The gap in attainment between A level and vocational students is closing. Success rates in the vocational programmes, especially dance and sport, are well above average. Attendance is now good and has improved since the last inspection. Students are eager to take on responsibilities across the school and elsewhere; very large numbers volunteer for local charity events. Students feel very safe in school and say that they enjoy their courses. Learning and teaching are good, with some examples of outstanding practice, as in a Year 13 English lesson, where the teacher communicated his love of English and commitment to standards to bring out the best in students. There are no major variations between the progress of different groups of students, and variations between subjects are being phased out. Better use of data to address underachievement is having a strong impact, especially on A level results. Good assessment strategies using



**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

exam criteria shows students how to improve. The current curriculum meets the needs of all students and flexibility is added by availability of courses at the neighbouring grammar school. Guidance on careers and future choices is now much improved but the school recognises that enrichment is an area for development. Excellent pastoral care includes the provision of a student support mentor.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

## Views of parents and carers

The questionnaires returned by parents and carers show that the very large majority are happy with their child's experience at the school. A small minority expressed concerns about communication, either about the school helping them to support their child's learning or taking account of their suggestions and concerns. The school has identified communication as an area for development and is working on further improvements in this area. Concerns about healthy lifestyles involved students having to eat their packed lunches outside. Inspectors have accepted the school's assurances that they are making appropriate arrangements to deal with these concerns.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Valley Park Community 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.

The inspection team received 295 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1041 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	74	25	195	66	18	6	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	103	35	181	61	7	2	2	7
The school informs me about my child's progress	113	38	165	56	11	4	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	97	33	174	59	16	5	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	76	26	186	63	20	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	62	21	175	59	41	15	4	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	12	195	66	45	15	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)	62	21	187	63	14	5	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	78	26	186	63	18	6	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	96	33	151	51	27	9	6	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	43	15	159	45	53	18	9	3
The school is led and managed effectively	98	33	162	55	21	7	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	109	37	163	55	8	3	3	1

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](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



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.

28 April 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Valley Park Community School, Maidstone ME14 5DT

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you very much for your warm welcome. We valued the opportunities we had to talk to you, both in small groups and as we moved around the school. We hope that you will take the time to look at our report, but we thought you would like a summary of our findings. Many of you told us what a good school Valley Park is and how it helps you to do your best. You are right to feel this way because Valley Park is an outstanding school. I would like to share with you some of the reasons why this is so:

- You make good progress and attain good results.
- Your behaviour is outstanding and you and your teachers respect each other and care for the individual.
- The teaching is good and staff work hard to help individuals.
- The curriculum is outstanding with a variety of pathways which enable you to develop your aspirations and interests.
- The school's specialism has improved many aspects of school life.

Your school is determined to continue to provide a high quality education for you and to make it even better. We have asked your teachers to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning by ensuring that lessons take full account of your needs and abilities and provide opportunities for you to contribute more fully in lessons. In this way, your progress will continue to improve.

You have a school to be proud of. We wish you and the school every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sutherland-Harper Lead inspector

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).**