

# Vallis First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123644
<b>Local Authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	359478
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10–11 November 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Martin Kerly

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	234
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Lstyn Lewis
<b>Headteacher</b>	Naomi Pauley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 November 2007
<b>School address</b>	Milk Street Frome BA11 3DB
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 17 lessons and 11 teachers, held meetings with pupils, governors and staff, and informally met parents and carers at the start of the day. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including the school's plans, policies, records of progress made by the pupils and 70 completed questionnaires received from parents and carers.

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

- The reasons why progress in mathematics has not been as rapid as in other subjects.
- The effectiveness of actions taken by the school to improve attendance.
- Provision for pupils of all abilities in the mixed-age classes.
- Evidence of outstanding practice designed to safeguard pupils and to promote their learning and well-being.

## Information about the school

This is an average-sized first school where the number of pupils on roll is rising slowly. Almost all pupils are White British and very few are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is significantly higher than usually found. The special educational needs are varied but mainly relate to speech and language development and/or emotional and behavioural issues. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in two single year-group classes. Older pupils are taught in two sets of parallel classes each comprised of two year groups. The school has achieved a number of national awards including Activemark and Healthy School 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?**

**2**

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

**2**

## Main findings

This is a good school. It is on a sustained journey of improvement with many strengths and few areas in need of significant improvement. Pupils enjoy their time in school, respond well to the extensive range of stimulating and challenging experiences and flourish in a caring and supportive atmosphere. They make good progress, often from low starting points. The care, guidance and support for all pupils are good and these contribute to their good personal development. The school works very effectively to support those pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and/or who have special educational needs and the support systems in school for these pupils are outstanding as are the arrangements for child protection. These qualities are acknowledged by almost all the significant proportion of parents and carers who responded to the inspectors' questionnaires. Comments, such as, 'a friendly, nurturing well-managed school,' and, 'the teachers are dedicated and give their all to the pupils to ensure they are happy and learning,' were typical of those received by the inspectors.

Good progress by children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is maintained by older pupils throughout Years 1 to 4. Progress by pupils is good throughout the school in reading, writing and science. In mathematics, it is beginning to accelerate, but remains satisfactory rather than good. The quality of teaching is good, although less consistent in mathematics than in other core subjects. Teachers and the large team of assistants work effectively to support those pupils with learning difficulties, some of whom make outstanding progress. The use of assessment and marking, and the match of work seen in mathematics lessons and pupils' books, whilst at least satisfactory, and often good, is not always matched to the full range of abilities or as effective as it is in other subjects. In a few classes there is not enough formal recording of mathematics work and little display around the classroom to promote mathematics learning. Teaching is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage where the newly formed team is trialling ways to plan for and assess children's learning and to make best use of the outside areas. However, it is too soon to be able to measure the impact of these new approaches to planning and assessment on learning and progress. Access to the outdoor areas remains somewhat restricted and the way they are organised and presented limits the quality of play and learning experiences for these young children.

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors use comprehensive and challenging systems for monitoring the work of the school. They have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's performance which enables them to accurately identify what needs to improve. The resulting actions have been concerted and effective. As a result, there have been significant and sustained improvements in teaching, curriculum and pupils' learning over recent times. This confirms the school's good capacity to improve further.

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

- Increase the rate of progress in mathematics, in order to match the good progress in other subjects, by July 2011 by ensuring:
  - teachers and pupils are clear about the precise next steps in the pupils' mathematical understanding and learning
  - work is consistently matched to the wide range of abilities in each class
  - all pupils regularly record their mathematics work in their books
  - all classrooms contain helpful displays to support and extend pupils' mathematical understanding.
- Improve the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by April 2011 by:
  - establishing consistent planning and assessment arrangements implemented by the whole team
  - improving children's access to the outdoor areas to encourage a free-flow in and out of doors
  - improving the quality of equipment and the way the outdoor area is presented and maintained in order to promote high-quality play and learning experiences.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

Pupils achieve well throughout their time in the school and enjoy the many stimulating and varied experiences. Attendance has improved substantially, following concerted work by the school with particular families and in partnership with outside agencies. It is now firmly in line with the national average. Attainment on entry is usually below expectations, but this year is close to that normally found. Evidence from lessons, pupils' books, work displayed in classrooms, discussions with pupils and the school's detailed assessment records shows boys and girls progress well so that attainment by the end of Year 4 is securely in line with national expectations. Clear examples of this were seen in pupils' work on skeletons in science and in a history lesson pupils were confidently comparing differences in lifestyles between the past and present day. A significant proportion of pupils attain levels marginally above expectations, especially in reading, writing and science. Attainment in mathematics is also broadly as expected nationally by the end of Year 4. However, in a few classes there is relatively little evidence of recorded mathematics work to show progress made so far this year. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Indeed, some make outstanding progress as a result of high-quality additional support by the skilled team of teachers and assistants. Pupils respond positively to the challenging targets they are set and pupils of all abilities currently in Year 4 are on course to maintain the steady upward trend in attainment. This level of basic skills and positive attitudes ensure pupils are securely placed to make the most of opportunities in their next school to promote their future economic well-being.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school throughout the day. Many conscientiously take on special responsibilities, such as being school councillors, eco team members, play leaders, or raising funds for charities, thereby contributing well to the school community. They feel safe and well cared for and demonstrate a sensible approach

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to potential dangers. They have a keen understanding of right and wrong and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as seen, for example, by the sensitive and thoughtful way they responded to, and talked about, Armistice Day. Most pupils have a good understanding of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles, although some recognise that their lunchboxes are not as healthy as they could be. They are keen to take regular physical exercise and many join sports groups and clubs. The quality of this work is recognised in the school's national awards.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
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>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</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>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<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

## How effective is the provision?

The support for vulnerable pupils is outstanding and a key feature in the school's overall good care, guidance and support for all pupils. Governors and leaders deploy a large and well-trained staff team in response to the pupils' needs, for example through the effective nurture group. The school works very effectively in partnership with external professionals to meet individual pupils' specific needs, and supports parents and families well in this process. Sensitive, yet firm, management enables pupils with challenging behaviour and emotional problems to be fully integrated into school life. The school continues to work determinedly with partners to reduce the small number of pupils who are persistently absent.

Teachers plan imaginative and stimulating activities from a broad and balanced curriculum that frequently captures the pupils' imagination. The curriculum is particularly well adapted

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to meet the needs of the substantial proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Good use is made of local expertise, visits and visitors and the older pupils benefit from a residential experience at a coastal field centre. Computer technology is used well with, for example, innovative work on film making. Relationships are good and there is a purposeful learning atmosphere in all classrooms. Frequently there is a lot of fun in learning, for example as seen in an English lesson when pupils were telling and signing the story of a talking avocado, then acting it out before moving to write the story. The school has well-developed systems for assessing pupils' learning and these enable teachers to plan work that, in the large majority of lessons, accurately reflects the full range of abilities in the mixed-age classes. Teachers provide clear feedback to pupils, especially in their English work, about how to improve, and almost all classrooms provide lots of helpful displays to promote the full range of literacy skills. Such support for mathematics learning is less consistent, although good in a number of classes. In a few lessons, particularly in mathematics, the pace of learning slows as work is insufficiently challenging, especially for the more able pupils.

*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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

The headteacher provides clear leadership and, together with other senior leaders, has established an effective team approach towards embedding a culture of high expectations for all. There are detailed and efficient systems for regularly checking the performance of all aspects of the school, including monitoring teaching and canvassing pupils' views. Information gained from these checks is used well to inform improvement planning, and the school has good capacity to sustain and build on previous improvements. Governors are kept well informed about the school's work. They receive exceptionally detailed reports from the headteacher enabling them to challenge and hold the school to account, which they do with increasing confidence. The responsibility for monitoring the progress of pupils is suitably shared between headteacher, senior leaders and class teachers and enables any variations to be identified and remedial action to be taken promptly. In this way the school is quick to overcome any variations in progress between girls and boys or parallel classes. This is an important aspect of the school's effective approach to promoting equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination. There are rigorous procedures designed to safeguard pupils with frequent staff training. The school is aware of the need to be constantly vigilant around the site. The arrangements for child protection are exemplary, and are a model of outstanding practice. The school works effectively to promote community cohesion and takes a leading role in local learning partnerships, celebrating the diversity of its community. It also has strong links further afield, for example the regular

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exchange of letters between pupils in a twinned Kenyan school, but work is less well developed at national level.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<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>2</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>2</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>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage is going through a period of transition with changes in staffing and a new leader undergoing training. The school is trialling new systems for planning the curriculum and assessing children's progress, which at present remain a little inconsistent. Nevertheless, children get off to a good start in their first year in school. Careful induction procedures enable them to settle quickly, so that during their first term they confidently follow routines and are at ease within their own classrooms and, for example, as seen when moving to and from the hall for assembly and a movement and drama session. Children respond well to the good teaching in each classroom. Teachers are effective at gaining children's interest, for example by receiving a surprise letter from the chef wanting them to help him design a cake or excitedly acting out the movements of characters in the Gingerbread Man. Children make good progress, often from low starting points, and last year most of those who were below the levels expected for the age group achieved the majority of the learning goals by the time they started in Year 1, particularly in personal, social and emotional development. Progress in mathematical calculation was satisfactory, although relatively few attained all the expected goals. The current cohort of children are working at levels expected for their age, and, as indicated by school assessment records, at levels above those previously noted in this school at this stage of the year.

The outdoor area is a considerable distance from the two classrooms and, although it has a secure boundary, children have to be accompanied at all times to and from and when using this area. This limits the opportunities for spontaneous or independent movement.

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The school is aware of the urgent need to refurbish the outdoor area and improve the range and quality of equipment available in order to promote high quality play and learning experiences and it is developing plans to address these issues.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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

Almost all parents and carers who replied to the inspectors' questionnaire replied positively about the majority of aspects of the school's work with no disagreements for around half the questions. This is very strong support. There was no significant level or pattern of disagreement about any aspect. There were 31 parents and carers who added written comments, of which 29 were positive. There was overwhelming agreement about their children enjoying school, the good teaching and leadership and the overall quality of experience in school. Inspectors agree with the parents' and carers' positive responses.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Vallis First 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 70 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 234 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	52	74	17	24	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	47	67	22	31	0	0	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	40	57	27	39	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	44	63	21	30	3	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	51	73	18	26	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	48	69	20	29	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	40	57	29	41	0	0	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)	39	56	23	33	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	43	61	22	31	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	39	37	53	0	0	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	44	33	47	0	0	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	48	69	21	30	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	55	79	14	20	0	0	1	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 all 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are 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 and spring terms 2009/10 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 pupils' 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.**



17 November 2010

Dear Children

**Inspection of Vallis First School, Frome BA11 3DB**

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to some of you and looking at your work. You told us you enjoy school and that it is a good place to be. We could see why. It is indeed a good school and your parents and carers are pleased you go to this school.

You work hard and make good progress, especially in reading, writing and science, and we could see you are good at using computers to support your learning. Your teachers plan interesting things for you to do in lessons and usually make sure the work is not too hard or too easy. All the adults who work at the school work closely with your families and are brilliant at making sure those of you who have problems or difficulties are cared for well. We were impressed by the way you behave in lessons and around the school, and we could see that lots of you take on jobs to help out, such as being school councillors, play leaders or members of the eco team. We found that you know how you can help to stay healthy by doing lots of exercise and eating healthy food, but some of you realize that your lunch boxes aren't always full of the healthiest things. Your headteacher is good at thinking of ways to improve the school and is helped in this by all the other leaders and the governors who work well together as a team. In order to make the school even better we have asked them to work on two things.

- Help you to make even more progress with your mathematics (numeracy) by being very clear about the next things you need to learn and how to improve, and that you get plenty of chances to record your work in your books.
- Find ways of improving the arrangements for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to make best use of their outdoor area.

You can help by continuing to work hard, especially in your mathematics lessons, and by doing your very best to come to school every day.

Yours sincerely

Martin Kerly

Lead inspector

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