

Valley Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134944
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	381761
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Roderick Passant

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	183
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phil Bloom
Headteacher	Chris Spinks
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2008
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Age group	5–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They saw 14 lessons taught by seven teachers. In addition, they made shorter visits to see a range of activities. They held meetings with members of the senior leadership team, a range of subject coordinators, representatives of the school council, a group of Year 6 pupils and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body. They also had informal discussions with parents and carers before school. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation relating to safeguarding and the school improvement plan. They scrutinised the questionnaire responses from 39 parents and carers, 85 pupils and 11 members of staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively are the school's leaders improving attainment?
- What improvements have been made in the Early Years Foundation Stage?
- How accurately does the school evaluate pupils' performance and itself, and how effectively are the results used to drive improvement?

Information about the school

The school is below average in size for a primary school. The very large majority of pupils are White British. The school has a broadly average proportion of pupils who come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, including a few pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is high. An above average proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, but the proportion of pupils requiring additional support or who have a statement detailing their educational needs is high. A high number of pupils join or leave partway through their primary school education.

Valley School was established in 2007 when it was formed from the amalgamation of a lower and middle school. Recent building works to move the school onto one site are nearing completion. Infant classes moved into the current accommodation in October. The school has the Active Sportsmark award.

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. Good leadership and management are ensuring that it continues to improve. Pupils make good progress over their time in school from very low starting points to reach broadly average attainment by the end of Year 6. This represents good achievement.

Historically, pupils' overall progress has relied on the rapid acceleration in the upper part of the school. Pupils are now making better progress in the infant section and this is beginning to raise previously low attainment at the end of Year 2. A consistent improvement in mathematics is not yet reflected in English, and writing remains a particular weakness, so that results in the English Year 6 tests are variable. The school knows itself well and is accurate in its judgements. This self-evaluation is based on full and wide consultation and good analysis of school data. There has been good progress in addressing the key issues identified in the last inspection. The capacity to sustain improvement is good.

Pupils behave well: the school is friendly and pupils get on well with each other. The school is a cohesive community. Pupils are considerate to each other and older pupils are caring of younger children. The school is also inclusive so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those learning to speak English as an additional language and those who join the school at various points in the school year are fully absorbed into the school community. Pupils give good support to one another. Good care and guidance underpin pupils' good progress. Adults have warm and good relationships with the pupils, who gain in confidence from the consistency and stability the school provides. Consequently pupils feel safe and secure.

Teaching and learning have improved. Although not entirely consistent, pupils make good progress in many lessons and teaching is never less than satisfactory. The best lessons are characterised by a broad range of teaching approaches which make challenging demands on the pupils, so that they practise their skills within the context of 'real' tasks and are supported by good ongoing assessment. However, marking does not always identify points for improvement. The school tracks the progress of all pupils carefully on a termly basis. Interim half-termly assessments were used to inform the recent parents' meeting. However, this information is not entered onto the school's system for monitoring progress. For older pupils, teachers assess half-termly and report the results to parents and carers along with pupils' effort grades. This process of half-termly assessment maintains the focus of moving pupils on in their learning, but is not used across the school.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils make consistently good or better progress in lessons by:
 - sharing the best practice in the school
 - engaging pupils' interests by using real-life problems
 - extending the range of teaching styles so that pupils have more opportunities to take the initiative and practise their skills in a range of contexts
 - ensuring that the pace in lessons is demanding enough to keep the learning moving along
 - ensuring that marking always identifies how pupils can improve their work.

- Raise standards in writing by ensuring that:
 - pupils develop a rich experience of stories
 - they have regular opportunities to write at length
 - there is a sustained focus in all classrooms on developing pupils' vocabulary and other literacy skills
 - creative use is made of drama, media and artefacts as starting points for writing
 - staff have opportunities to develop their skills in teaching writing through additional training.

- Sharpen the ongoing focus on pupils' progress by:
 - assessing half-termly where pupils are in their learning in English and mathematics
 - entering this information into the system for monitoring progress so that all leaders have an up-to-date picture of how well pupils are achieving
 - sharing this information with pupils and their parents and carers half-termly, along with their effort grades.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Although there is a full range of ability, the large majority of children start school at a much earlier stage of development than is generally seen, particularly in their social skills and attitudes to learning. Their skills build well in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and the progress seen in the majority of lessons throughout the school and intervention groups was good. Sometimes pupils are a little chatty and leisurely in approach if the pace of the learning is not demanding enough. Even in these cases they are, however, responsive to the teacher. In an English lesson, pupils engaged particularly well with their task of sequencing instructions, aided by the fact that there was a real audience and purpose to the activity. In a mathematics lesson, pupils responded to the fun of creating a 'force field' by correctly sequencing large negative numbers by working quickly. The 'real' problems added additional focus to

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their work. Pupils work well in pairs and in groups when given the opportunity and enjoy their work, reporting that lessons are interesting. All pupils judged that they learn a lot in lessons and almost all that they enjoy school.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with behavioural, social or emotional difficulties, make good progress. Pupils learning to speak English as an additional language make initially slow progress which then accelerates, although their attainment in written English is below average. A few of these pupils joined relatively late in their school career, which adds to the picture of lower attainment in English. The most able pupils are challenged appropriately in mathematics, and this is reflected in the above-average number attaining the higher National Curriculum levels in the 2011 Year 6 tests. In English, teacher assessments indicated a broadly similar proportion on target for the higher levels but pupils did not do so well in the tests. Writing skills are generally competent in shorter writing tasks but less so when pupils are asked to write at length. The school has been effective in raising girls’ attainment in mathematics, where boys traditionally do well. In lessons, there was no discernable difference between boys’ and girls’ performance.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle, including the importance of healthy eating and exercise. They responded well to the sequence of themed assemblies on healthy eating. All pupils have two hours of physical education a week and participation in the various exercise-based clubs is high. Pupils act as buddies and the school council is influential. With direction pupils take on roles to support the school and wider community, and are involved in a variety of charitable events.

Pupils are given opportunities to reflect on significant events. Their exemplary behaviour during the school’s two-minute silence of remembrance reflects their ability to rise to the occasion. There are good opportunities to work and play together. Year 6 pupils were clearly anticipating their forthcoming residential trip with excitement and some trepidation. Pupils from a variety of backgrounds get on well with each other. The school works hard to foster their self-esteem and aspirations by providing opportunities for success. The school provides a sound foundation for the next steps in their education and later life.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	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

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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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	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teachers manage their classes using consistent approaches to reinforce good behaviour. They create a positive ethos and have good relationships with their class. Teachers make good use of the interactive whiteboards and generally display good subject knowledge. Where lessons are satisfactory there is still effective reinforcement of skills, but teachers tend to draw on a narrower range of approaches and make more use of textbook rather than real-life problems. Assessment has some strengths. Pupils know what the lesson is about and teachers use questioning effectively to check on their understanding. All staff make good use of the school system for tracking pupils' progress. However, because the data are only entered termly it does not give senior or subject leaders an up-to-date picture.

Teaching assistants provide skilled support to pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, by nudging their thinking along through focused questioning. They support pupils' independence but do not do the thinking for them. Resources are appropriately enhanced to support individual pupils. Pupils and their parents and carers make extensive use of the virtual learning environment for homework tasks and learning activities. Learning is also supported by pupils' above-average attendance.

Science, physical education, and information and communication technology (ICT) are strong features within the curriculum. However, literacy skills lag behind numeracy skills and opportunities are often missed to support and develop them in lessons. Pupils benefit from a good range of enrichment activities. The curriculum is modified in the infant stage to smooth the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage with two learning support assistants providing support for teaching phonics – the sounds that letters make – and other interventions. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are split into ability groupings for mathematics and English, using teachers' individual strengths and allowing for teaching to support and challenge a narrower range of ability. There are good partnerships to support physical education, and good links with a locally-based inclusion unit. The school provides a broad range of subjects so that, in design and technology for example, individual pupils gained a real sense of achievement in their electric car construction. One-to-one tuition has played a key

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part in developing girls’ achievement in mathematics.

Clearly targeted support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities helps both pupils and their families through, for example, coffee mornings and assistance with forms. Specialist agencies are used well to support individual pupils according to individual need, including those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable. The school council commented on the good support that they receive on entry to the school and the transition to the secondary school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Staff judge the school to be well led, feel valued and know what the school is trying to achieve. They are also proud to be a member of staff at the school. Target-setting is challenging, particularly for older pupils, and is linked to the performance management of staff. The result is that the proportion of pupils gaining the expected level and above in English and mathematics is above what might be expected from their Year 2 results. There are still some inconsistencies in teaching, and some of the recent initiatives introduced by subject leaders have yet to have an impact. The building programme has meant that the school is now on one site. This in turn has contributed to the good teamwork and made it easier for staff to influence and support each other.

Governance has improved and is now good. The inherited deficit budget has been tackled well and funding secured for the building works. The members of the governing body evaluate the work of the school through lesson observations and learning walks to supplement the good information that they receive, so that decisions and the ability to question and challenge the school are informed by their first-hand experience. The governing body also funds additional sessions with the school’s external consultant to gain an outsider’s view. It ensures that safeguarding is good, because responsibilities and protocols are clear and understood by all.

The school is committed to tackling any forms of discrimination and raising pupils’ aspirations. Pupils, for example, reported that there is no racism. The school has successfully raised girls’ attainment in mathematics but has yet to ensure that pupils’ English skills consistently improve, as reflected in the Year 6 tests.

The school is a cohesive community and work within the curriculum informs pupils of

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the diverse nature of society. It knows its local community well. It carries out some outreach work, for example the school choir performs at the local home for older people at Christmas and the school raises funds for a leprosy charity, and has some overseas links. The school liaises well with parents and carers. Informal discussion with parents reinforced the questionnaire comments that they were kept well informed. The virtual learning environment is used extensively by pupils, parents and carers to support pupils’ learning by ensuring homework and support material is posted on it. In addition, the school publishes the top 10 tips to support their child’s learning and there is an increased number of volunteers working with young children. There is good attendance at parental meetings. The learning mentor and family worker play a key role in supporting individuals and their families. The headteacher’s presence on the playground every morning provides an additional informal channel for parents and carers who may be more reluctant to approach the school formally.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

From a very low level, children make good progress in all the areas of learning although their attainment in early reading, writing and calculating skills is still low when they enter Year 1. Children are happy, curious and immerse themselves in their various activities, sticking to their tasks and play. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. There is a good balance of child-chosen and adult-initiated learning activities which stimulate their enjoyment and foster their developing independence. Ongoing assessment and recording of significant learning identifies the next steps in their learning and ensures that children make good progress. The good provision is underpinned by the rigour of this assessment. Teaching is good because adults are skilled at exploiting the language and number opportunities within

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the various activities through careful questioning and the warm, positive relationships they develop with the children. The teaching of phonics is presented in a fun, lively manner and by encouraging children to hear the difference in the sounds that make up words. This is supported by careful enunciation of words and signing, for example the 'p' of 'poppy'. Children's specific needs are identified early. The class has only recently moved into the classroom so books and stories are not yet displayed well. Good attention is paid to children's welfare needs. There is strong teamwork and the manager is very reflective and constantly seeking further improvements to move the children on in their learning. This has led, for example, to receiving all the Reception children into the class in September rather than the previous staggered starts, and encouraging parents and carers to become even more involved in their children's learning.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The number of responses is lower than average but the positive responses are higher than generally seen. There were few comments. These were largely supportive of the headteacher and staff and the support they give to their children.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Valley Primary 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 39 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 183 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	64	14	36	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	28	72	11	28	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	28	72	11	28	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	77	9	23	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	27	69	12	31	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	27	69	11	28	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	56	17	44	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)	17	44	18	46	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	26	67	11	28	2	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	56	15	38	2	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	22	56	17	44	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	27	69	12	31	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	29	74	10	26	0	0	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 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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 8 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



14 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Valley Primary School, Norfolk, NR5 8XZ

Thank you for making us so welcome in your school. I would like to thank those pupils who completed the questionnaire and those who gave up part of their time to talk to us. What you had to say was helpful.

This is a good school. You are right to feel proud of it. You make good progress and attain broadly average standards in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6. I have, however, asked the headteacher to work with staff to give you more opportunities to write at length to improve your writing skills. You behave well. The school is friendly and you get on well with other pupils, including those whose backgrounds are different from your own. The school provides you with an appropriate foundation for your future school career. Your attendance is above average.

You make good progress in many lessons because your teachers are skilled and they care a great deal about you and support you well. I have asked the headteacher to work with staff to ensure you make good progress in all your lessons, by helping staff to use a broader range of teaching styles and make more use of real-life problems. I have also asked the headteacher to keep an even stronger focus on the progress you are making by including an assessment of where you are in your learning when teachers send home your effort reports at half term. This happens in the older classes but it is not general across the school. I also asked him to enter these interim assessments onto the school's system for tracking your progress, so that everyone has an up-to-date picture of how well you are doing.

The school has improved since my colleagues visited it last. If you continue to help by aiming high and working hard I am sure it will continue to do so.

Yours sincerely

Roderick Passant
Lead inspector

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