

Villa Real School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114345
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	378845
Inspection dates	9–10 May 2012
Lead inspector	Liz Godman

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	80
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joanne Heeley
Headteacher	Gill Stringer
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Liz Godman
Bobbi Mothersdale

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with one day's notice. Inspectors observed 13 lessons taught by 13 teachers and teaching assistants. Inspectors met groups of pupils, staff and representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at its records of monitoring and self-evaluation, data on pupils' progress and information about the curriculum. Inspectors looked at responses to the on-line (Parent View) survey, questionnaires completed by pupils and staff and 23 questionnaires completed by parents and carers.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized special school, which makes provision for pupils with severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.

At the time of the inspection, the headteacher was absent due to illness and the school was led by an acting headteacher, who is the school's deputy headteacher.

The school holds specialist status for communication and interaction and has a number of awards, including the International School Award and the Rights Respecting School Award. There is an after-school club and holiday-club. This is not managed by the governing body and is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The most recent report is available on the Ofsted website.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. The quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are good. The school is not yet outstanding because the rate of pupils' progress slows a little in some lessons and some lessons do not focus closely enough on the targets in pupils' individual education plans.
- Pupils make good progress from when they join the Early Years Foundation Stage and through Years 1 to 11 and the sixth form. By the time they leave the sixth form all students have gained the ASDAN Towards Independence award. All groups of pupils make good progress, whether they have severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils make particularly good progress in communication and interaction and some develop early reading, writing and numeracy skills well.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good, and some is outstanding. Where teaching is outstanding, pupils show exceptionally high levels of engagement and enjoyment. Support staff make a good contribution to teaching and to pupils' learning.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. This is because good behaviour is promoted and those with challenging behaviour are helped to improve their behaviour. Pupils say they feel safe and that bullying is rare. Parents and carers agree that their children are safe in school.
- Leadership and management are good. Leaders and managers know the school well and take effective steps to develop the quality of teaching and to make sure that pupils make at least good progress. The curriculum is outstanding because of the wide range of exciting experiences it offers, matched well to pupils' needs. This helps to secure pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The sixth form is good and caters for students' needs well.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the rate of pupils' progress in learning by ensuring that:
 - all lessons proceed at a good pace for all the pupils in the class
 - there is closer reference in all teachers' planning and in lessons as to how the activities provided will enable all pupils to meet the targets in their individual education plans.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' learning in lessons is good. Pupils of all abilities are interested in the activities provided, although, occasionally, the pace of learning slows a little. This is because the whole class stays together for too long, some pupils spend time waiting for others in the group to respond to the teacher's questions or time is lost as pupils move to the next activity. However, there are also examples of outstanding engagement. In a music lesson taught by a visiting specialist teacher, everyone in a class of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders participated fully in banging the drum or in simulating train noises. In another music lesson, the levels of engagement and involvement were exceptionally high. This was evident in the pupils' signing, clapping and singing and in the delighted expressions on the faces of those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Occasionally too, when a pupil in the class exhibits extremely challenging behaviour, almost all the other pupils carry on with their work in a mature and focused way, for example, rearranging words on the interactive whiteboard to make a correct sentence.

Pupils' progress over time, from very low starting points, is also good. All parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agree that their child is making good progress. This is consistent from the age of two years when a small number of children join the Early Years Foundation Stage through to the age of 19 when students prepare to leave the sixth form. All groups of pupils make good progress irrespective of their special educational needs or circumstances. The communication and interaction skills of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders are developing particularly well and this is due to the highly appropriate and well-matched methods used. Other groups of students are also acquiring these skills and building on them to make good progress in the early stages of reading, writing and mathematics. No opportunity is missed to promote these skills across the curriculum. Conductive education lessons (designed to improve the co-ordination and movement skills of pupils with physical disabilities), physical education lessons and 'bear hunts' in the outdoor forest area all enable pupils to apply communication, literacy and mathematical skills, as well as to improve co-ordination and physical skills.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because this is emphasised throughout the school. This is evident in the high levels of respect pupils show for one another, in the spontaneous celebration of others' achievements and in the depth of appreciation of their own and others' cultures, including songs from the north-east of England, work on Fair Trade or through links with India. Students in the sixth form are prepared well for the next stage in their lives and all leave with the ASDAN Towards Independence award.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire say their children are taught well. The inspection confirms the quality of teaching as good and, sometimes, outstanding. This secures the pupils' good progress. Teachers' high expectations are reflected in their planning, although occasionally lesson objectives and activities are not focused closely enough on targets in pupils' individual education plan. Overall, the use of assessment is good and the majority of lessons are matched well to most pupils' needs. All staff have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the pupils and use this to adapt the lesson accordingly, often with extreme sensitivity. For example, support staff recognise when pupils, whether children in the Early Years Foundation Stage or sixth-form students, are tiring of a particular activity and intervene accordingly. This prevents the escalation of inappropriate behaviour. Teaching assistants contribute well to pupils' learning, whether leading a lesson or by providing effective support for individual pupils.

Staff use the outstanding curriculum to ensure that lessons extend pupils' experiences and are relevant to their needs. The consistent approach to developing independence, communication and interaction skills is very effective and contributes to pupils' outstanding social development. For example, pupils with severe autistic spectrum disorders respond positively to visitors and initiate interactions quietly and calmly. Careful teaching also enables pupils to make good gains in reading and writing, supported by the good use of symbols, communication aids and information and communication technology (ICT). Staff promote cultural development exceptionally well and in a manner suited well to pupils' needs. At the time of the inspection, a group of students was in Greece, while sixth-form students with profound and multiple learning difficulties learned about Jamaica by touching, smelling and tasting different Jamaican foods and expressing their preferences clearly using facial expression, vocalisation and eye-pointing.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour is good. A few pupils and their parents and carers, who responded to the questionnaire, comment that lessons are disrupted by bad behaviour. Inspectors observed some instances of inappropriate and challenging behaviour arising from pupils' particular special educational needs. However, these were managed swiftly and calmly, minimising any disruption to learning. In addition, many pupils continued with their work, which is evidence of their growing self-control and positive attitudes to learning. Occasionally, pupils lose attention or interest. This is when the pace of the lesson slows and pupils wait patiently, rather than showing initiative or independence in learning. The school's records indicate that behaviour is good, with marked improvements in behaviour over time for a number of pupils with particular needs. Pupils say that bullying is rare, confirmed by the school's records. Parents and carers responding to the questionnaire say that bullying is dealt with effectively. The inspection confirms this. The school helps pupils to understand the different forms of bullying and what to do if it occurs. For example, the school identified sexual orientation and homophobic bullying as an area for further work and introduced this into the curriculum.

Pupils say that they feel safe and all their parents and carers, who responded to the questionnaire, agree. Pupils are polite and courteous and take good care of one another. Adults provide strong role models, as do many pupils. For example, pupils in Key Stage 4 undertake work experience in the classes of younger children, showing high levels of responsibility and pride in the support they offer. Pupils understand unsafe situations and

how to manage risks in a very practical way, for example, when working in the 'forest school' or undertaking outdoor activities, including rock climbing and kayaking. The school is maintained well and provides a safe and orderly setting for effective learning.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers have developed a strong team. Staff at all levels are committed to ensuring pupils' learning and well-being. In the absence of the headteacher, staff have assumed additional responsibilities, ensuring the smooth day-to-day running of the school. The calm approaches of the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have secured the support of staff in maintaining the good quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. When a pupil exhibits challenging behaviour, designated staff provide swift assistance and others ensure that pupils' learning is not disrupted by the incident.

Leaders' evaluations of the school's work are accurate. Middle leaders contribute well to monitoring and evaluation. An extensive and well-co-ordinated programme gives them a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in their subject area. This is used to extend the knowledge and skills of other staff. Following the previous inspection, steps have been taken to ensure that monitoring and evaluation are more regular and rigorous. Findings are used well to identify priorities for professional development and performance management, which, in turn, have improved the quality of teaching and the assessment of pupils' progress. These improvements, highly accurate self-evaluation and strong leadership are indicative of the school's good capacity for sustained improvement.

The curriculum is outstanding, because it provides pupils with rich and varied experiences, which extend their understanding of the wider world. This is a particular challenge, given pupils' varied and complex needs. Nevertheless, the curriculum is adapted very effectively to make it accessible and relevant to the needs of each pupil. Consequently, all pupils make good progress in communication, reading, writing and mathematics and show outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Equality of opportunity is promoted well and the school's vigilance ensures that any rare discrimination or bullying are tackled decisively. The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements, arrangements for child protection are secure and processes for the recruitment of staff are safe. The governing body gives good support, knows the school well and provides good challenge to staff to make further improvements.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add up exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



11 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Villa Real School, Consett, DH8 6BH

Thank you for your help with the inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and watching you at work.

You go to a good school. You make good progress from when you join the school as young children, through to when you leave the sixth form. It was good to learn that everyone gains the ASDAN Towards Independence award. It does not matter what your particular needs are - you all do well. We were impressed by the way in which some of you who find talking to other people very difficult, made us feel welcome and showed us your work or how much you were enjoying the lessons. It was good to see some of you getting on so well with reading, writing and mathematics.

You are taught well and all the staff help you to take part in everything. I saw how much you enjoyed the music lessons, whether banging the big drum or clapping and singing the 'Geordie' songs. You are keen to learn and behave well. Those of you who find it very hard to behave well all the time are helped to improve this and to learn well. You told us that you feel safe and that bullying is rare in school. Your parents and carers agree.

The staff provide you with some very exciting activities, like working in the 'forest', going kayaking, tasting and smelling interesting food or going to Greece. These things are helping you to learn to get along with other people, to take care of yourselves and to find out about the wider world.

Your acting headteacher and staff know the school well and are keen to make it even better for you. To help them with this we have asked them to make sure you learn as quickly as you can in every lesson. I wish you every success in this.

Yours sincerely,
Liz Godman
Lead Inspector

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