

Valence School

Westerham Road, Westerham, Kent TN16 1QN

Inspection dates

18–19 July 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- School improvement processes are not effective enough. Leaders at all levels do not consistently analyse the information they collect and identify ways in which the school can be improved. Although most leaders have a reasonable understanding of strengths and weaknesses, and know broadly what they need to improve, they do not identify specifically the actions they plan to take and the intended impact.
- Staff performance processes do not help to improve the school. Targets are not precise enough and it is not clear what will improve as a result.
- Governors do not fulfil their responsibilities as well as they should. They do not hold leaders to account for school improvement and are not sufficiently involved in evaluating the school's effectiveness.
- There is no direct link between teachers' pay and the impact they have on improving the school. Leaders do not hold more experienced and highly paid teachers to account.

The school has the following strengths

- Following a social care inspection in March, which judged safeguarding and leadership to be inadequate, leaders have taken advice and acted swiftly and effectively to resolve the issues which were identified.
- Teaching across the school, including in the early years and sixth form, is good. As a result, pupils make good progress personally and academically.
- Pupils' behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school. Pupils feel safe and are kept safe.
- Pupils' welfare is supported well. Their individual needs are met through on-site professionals, detailed and robust support plans and caring and respectful relationships with staff.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - involving governors fully in evaluating the school’s effectiveness and planning how the school can be improved
 - ensuring that governors have a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities, so that they ensure that the school meets all statutory requirements
 - sharpening school improvement processes and planning so that leaders identify and share priorities for improvement, and plan strategically how they will be developed
 - improving performance management processes so that the highest paid teachers are held accountable and targets are precise and linked to improvements for pupils
 - developing middle leaders’ skills so that they identify exactly what needs to be improved and how they can bring about the improvements.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Following the social care inspection in March, which judged the boarding provision to be inadequate, leaders have taken swift and robust action to rectify weaknesses. Consequently, improvements in many areas can be seen. However, leaders' processes for identifying and improving the school are weak. This means that leaders do not have the necessary strategies in place to ensure continued and systematic school improvement. Weaknesses in governance exacerbate this.
- Documents to support school improvement are not robust. Although senior leaders identify whole-school priorities for improvement, there is not always a clear rationale for the selected priorities. Staff are not fully aware of the priorities and do not know how what they do has an impact. As a result, improvements are not as rapid or effective as they should be.
- Middle leaders have useful skills. However, they do not systematically plan how they can improve their areas of responsibility. Their monitoring of their areas of responsibility is not sufficient to be sure that they are making an accurate evaluation of the school's effectiveness.
- Staff performance processes are not effective in making the school better. Targets for teachers are not precise enough and it is not clear what will improve once targets are achieved. Many of the teachers who are paid on the highest rate are not held to account for having a significant impact on the school.
- Leaders check academic progress of pupils carefully, identifying any pupils who are at risk of not achieving their targets. When this is the case, effective support is put in place to help them catch up. Although pupils make good progress in non-academic skills, leaders do not currently have a rigorous system for recording or analysing this.
- Leaders check teaching appropriately and provide useful feedback. Senior leaders' evaluation of the quality of teaching is accurate and they know exactly what is working well and what could be better. Other leaders are sometimes too positive about teaching and the feedback they give is not as helpful for teachers to know how they can be better.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and appropriately adapted for individuals. Leaders provide interesting opportunities to support pupils' learning.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported very well. Pupils demonstrate a thorough understanding of tolerance, respect and equality. As a consequence of the challenges they face, they have a strong awareness of individual liberty, both for themselves and for others. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used sensibly and helps pupils to make progress. However, reporting and analysis of the impact it brings are weak.
- Sports funding is used well to broaden pupils' opportunities but there is a lack of precision about how that will happen.
- Leaders communicate well with parents. Recent communication on leaders' plans to

tackle weaknesses identified by Ofsted and change school hours have been detailed and appropriate.

- New staff are supported well through a robust induction process which covers all aspects of school life, including safeguarding.

Governance of the school

- Governors are not as effective as they should be. The full governing body does not have a thorough understanding of its responsibilities. It is not sufficiently involved in evaluating the school's effectiveness and planning school improvement. It is not robust enough in ensuring that staff and leaders are held to account.
- Some individual governors have a good understanding of their specific roles, such as the recently appointed safeguarding governor and the chair of teaching and learning. Consequently, these areas of governance are stronger and are having a positive impact on the school.
- Governors have begun to collect their own evidence to check what they are told. This is helping them to be more fully informed and enable them to ask useful questions. However, there is more to do to ensure that their work supports and drives school improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- As a result of the recent inadequate safeguarding judgement, leaders have implemented high-quality, relevant training for safeguarding leaders, staff and governors. They have reviewed their procedures for recording and reporting concerns and safer recruitment. Consequently, all at the school know and fulfil their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe.
- School leaders work well with the local authority, making appropriate referrals and taking all advice seriously.
- Despite weaknesses in governance, the governor with responsibility for safeguarding has a thorough understanding of her role and carries out useful checks to ensure that safeguarding processes are robust.
- Checks on staff are appropriately managed and recorded centrally. Safer recruitment processes are in place and leaders have carried out all necessary checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching across the school meets pupils' individual needs well and brings about good progress. Learning is clearly identified and activities link well and are at the right level.
- Teachers ask useful questions to check prior learning, assess pupils' understanding and encourage pupils to explain their thinking. Teachers use this information effectively to plan lessons which build well on what pupils already know and can do.

- Good relationships with staff support pupils' learning and understanding well. Pupils are confident to ask for help and support if required. Just occasionally, pupils are given too much help so some opportunities for developing independence are not utilised.
- Teachers plan learning and activities which are interesting and motivating. Pupils enjoy learning and appreciate teachers' efforts to make lessons fun. Pupils concentrate and remain on task for sustained periods. They take learning seriously and try hard. As a result, lessons are calm and purposeful.
- Although lessons focus on academic progress, pupils also develop their personal and physical skills. Activities are carefully planned to provide opportunities for pupils to practise and extend non-academic skills. Where these skills are explicitly included in teachers' planning, pupils make even more progress.
- Mathematics is taught well across the school. When needed, the mathematics leader provides effective support to develop teachers' subject knowledge and practice. The school has focused sharply on developing pupils' mental mathematics skills through effective daily sessions. This has had a very positive impact on pupils' confidence and skills to solve problems mentally and explain their thinking.
- Teaching of English is slightly variable. The leader who has recently taken responsibility for English has a good understanding of where teaching is not quite as strong and has sensible plans to tackle inconsistencies and raise standards so English is as strong as other areas.
- Pupils read with fluency and expression, using phonics well to decode complex words. They choose books independently and enjoy reading, both at school and at home.
- Teaching in science, art and computing is effective and pupils make good, or very good, progress in these subjects.
- Physical education and development is taught well and promoted strongly across the school. Pupils are encouraged and supported to engage in physical activity and participate in sports opportunities.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged are taught effectively. Teachers meet the needs of these pupils by identifying and removing barriers to learning. They provide additional support when required. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as their peers.
- The most able pupils are taught well. Occasionally they are not moved on quickly enough and the work is too easy for them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils demonstrate a deep understanding of how to keep safe on line. As pupils progress through the school, using increasingly complex technologies, they are taught how to manage their privacy settings and make informed decisions about what will be useful for them. Appropriate filters are in place according to the age and stage of pupils.
- Transition is supported very well, both within the school and when pupils leave. They

receive effective emotional support and guidance, and communication with parents is helpful and timely.

- Pupils learn to be safe and healthy through lessons and assemblies. They learn to budget, plan, prepare and cook meals. Pupils describe what constitutes a healthy meal and why it is important for them to eat well.
- Sport and physical development is promoted strongly. Pupils develop their physical skills through a range of sports and activities. They build good stamina through regular practise and challenges, such as pupils recording their exercise so they can demonstrate they have travelled a distance equivalent to completing the London marathon.
- Pupils are supported well to become independent. Over time pupils develop ways of overcoming some of the challenges they face, for example with feeding, controlling wheelchairs and computer keyboards and mice.
- Pupils share their views effectively through the school council. Their feedback is taken seriously by leaders, for example, the primary playground was suggested and designed by pupils. They have also contributed their ideas to the design of the school uniform and other aspects of school life.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are kind to each other and are supportive of each other's needs. They work well together, sharing ideas and respecting one another's points of view.
- Pupils say that bullying does not happen at this school. They say they know whom to speak to if they are worried and staff are quick to resolve issues. Pupils are respectful to adults and appreciate the care that staff show them.
- Positive behaviour management strategies de-escalate situations and ensure that a calm learning environment is maintained. Incidents and sanctions are now recorded but analysis of this is not consistent so leaders miss opportunities to identify ways of improving care for pupils.
- Attendance is checked carefully and is improving. Leaders support pupils to be in school by providing medical and dental care in school, so that pupils do not have to make the arduous and time-consuming journey to London clinics. Pupils appreciate this and recognise the benefits to their well-being and education.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well across the school, both personally and academically. Teachers set appropriate academic targets for pupils, identifying the next steps in pupils' learning. Almost all pupils achieve their targets and, where they do not, leaders and teachers take steps to identify and remove barriers to learning. Achievement in mathematics and science is particularly good and a high percentage of pupils exceed targets in these subjects.
- Through education, health and care plans, pupils are set appropriate non-academic

targets and these are communicated to staff across the school. Where pupils make the most progress, these targets are included in all lesson plans and all staff who work with pupils know exactly what each individual needs to develop. However, this does not happen in all classes and subjects.

- Pupils across the school make good progress in non-academic areas, such as decision-making and fine and gross motor control. Although pupils are supported well to develop these skills, leaders and staff do not record progress and targets systematically, so sometimes opportunities are missed to promote development of these skills further.
- Over time, pupils develop their independence, in line with the school's vision. The recently appointed independence coordinator identifies and plans ways in which pupils embed skills, such as through home living in the boarding provision. Pupils develop helpful life skills such as budgeting and cooking.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well compared to their peers. Effective use of funding ensures that barriers to learning are removed.
- The oldest and youngest pupils do well. In the early years, all three pupils met their targets. In the sixth form, students achieve particularly well in mathematics and science. Although all students meet their targets in English, no students exceeded their targets in this subject.
- Pupils for whom the national curriculum is not appropriate make good progress against an alternative curriculum. Pupils are set appropriate targets and teaching is carefully planned to support individuals' development.
- Communication skills are developed well. Across the school pupils communicate their thoughts and ideas with staff and pupils, using a range of strategies, including IT.
- Outcomes in art are a particular strength. Pupils work with and produce high-quality pieces using a range of materials and skills.

Early years provision

Good

- Early years provision is well structured to meet pupils' needs and support their introduction into school life well. Effective routines and carefully planned support ensure that children make good progress and reach target.
- Staff know and understand children's needs very well, providing high-quality care and support. At all times children receive the personal and academic support they need to be happy and do well. They are kept safe at all times.
- Parents contribute to children's learning. The communication and advice from the school helps parents to know how they can support activities and skills.
- Leadership of the early years is developing. The early years leader has set up the new early years class and has worked to ensure that the setting and environment meet children's needs well. She has rightly planned for the early years class to move to a larger room adjacent to the play area which would meet their needs more fully.
- Children develop effective skills to be independent when choosing and participating in activities. They enjoy having opportunities to make decisions about what they do.

- Lessons are very well planned and delivered. Support staff provide very effective support for children to access learning, without doing too much for them. In less-formal activities, support staff occasionally do not use their time quite as well as they could.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Students in the sixth form follow individualised study programmes that build on their existing knowledge and skills and prepare them well for the next stage of their lives.
- Students deepen their knowledge and understanding of English and mathematics through appropriate study programmes. They apply their skills through a variety of functional activities within the community and the school setting.
- Teaching meets pupils' needs well. The knowledge and understanding of students' needs displayed by staff ensures that they are supported well. There are high expectations that they will achieve, and the level of challenge in the work that they undertake is sufficient. As a result, outcomes are positive in all areas of the curriculum and particularly strong in mathematics and humanities.
- The curriculum is relevant and provides students with skills that will support them in the future. Music and personal, social and health education lessons support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Enrichment tasks, such as cooking, support students' progress towards independent living and the transferral of these skills from school to home.
- Effective physical education development supports students' participation in local and national sporting events such as powerchair football, boccia and table cricket. Physical fitness is featured throughout the day in the form of regular gym sessions that focus on students' core physical development, strength and endurance. Students value these experiences and their confidence and resilience improves as a result.
- Impartial and relevant careers advice and support, which is started in key stage 3, continues in the sixth form. Students are encouraged to visit different placements so that they and their families can make informed decisions about their futures. The school supports this by developing a carefully planned transition programme that involves preparing pupils for the differing situations and experiences that they will face when they leave the school. Students have the opportunity to access work experience placements, but these do not take place as early as they should.

School details

Unique reference number	119032
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10024855

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	29
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Davies
Headteacher	Roland Gooding
Telephone number	01959 562156
Website	www.valenceschool.com
Email address	rgooding@valence.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 November 2013

Information about this school

- All pupils have an education, health and care plan for physical difficulties. A significant proportion have complex medical, health and communication difficulties.
- The school is situated in beautiful grounds on the outskirts of a small town in Kent. There is a lake and woodland which are used to support learning activities.
- Around half the pupils use the school's residential provision. Each boarder has a personalised package of time and support in the residential provision.
- Pupils enter the school at various starting points across all key stages. Pupil groupings vary in size from year to year. Pupils are taught in mixed-aged classes across the

school due to the varying numbers in each year group.

- Approximately two thirds of pupils are boys.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below average.
- The proportions of pupils from ethnic backgrounds other than White British and pupils who speak English as an additional language are well below average.
- The school has specialist status for sports.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons or parts of lessons across all classes, all of which were carried out with senior leaders. Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons and around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and three governors, including the chair and vice-chair. A telephone conversation was held with a fourth governor. Meetings were also held with leaders, teachers and pupils, and with the adviser from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views through the school's own survey, 22 responses to Parent View, a telephone conversation and an email to Ofsted.
- School documentation was reviewed: the school's evaluation of its effectiveness and the development plan, minutes of governors' meetings, staff performance targets, reports and reviews completed by external advisers from Kent County Council.
- Her Majesty's Inspector also scrutinised safeguarding documentation, including records of the school's work with other agencies.
- Staff views were gathered through meetings, informal conversations and one response to the staff questionnaire. Eight pupil surveys were also considered.

Inspection team

Louise Adams, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Emma Sanderson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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