

Valence School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119032
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313162
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Farrell

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	83
6th form	33
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julian Paul
Headteacher	Roland Gooding
Date of previous school inspection	16 June 2003
School address	Westerham Road Westerham TN16 1QN
Telephone number	01959 562156
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Age group	5-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Valence School is a day and boarding school educating pupils having physical difficulties. There are 56 boys and 27 girls. In the Upper School, there are 33 pupils in Key Stage 5 with the majority of Year 12 studying three-year extended GCSE courses. Most pupils come from Kent and 22 are from other local authorities. More than half of pupils are weekly boarders and all in the Further Education Unit are boarders as a matter of policy. There are eight pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and two are learning English as an additional language. Most pupils use powered wheelchairs to move around and many have complex medical needs requiring medical care, therapy and technological or other support. Attainment on entry is below average but the range is wide. Occasionally, pupils leave at 16 but the majority remain and receive their post-16 education at the school, many attending specialist colleges at 19. At the time of the inspection, there were no children in the Foundation Stage and no admissions scheduled for this stage, so it is not reported. The school's provision for boarders was separately inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in December 2006.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Valence is a good school. Parents express very positive views saying, 'It is a caring, safe environment'; 'I am extremely happy and my child is too'; and that Valence 'provides the best education, care and opportunities for development'. Pupils recognise the opportunities for them to be fully involved in their education, saying of staff, 'They work with you.'

Pupils are extremely enthusiastic about their school. Their good personal development and well-being are aided by the good support they receive to try hard and strive for the higher levels of independence. Social, spiritual and moral development is good and cultural development satisfactory. Students behave safely and are sensitive to each other's needs because there are good structures to encourage safe practices. They have an exceptional commitment to pursuing healthy lifestyles because great emphasis is placed on physical effort and activity and the importance of healthy eating. Their good economic well-being is supported by good opportunities to develop key literacy and numeracy skills, but opportunities are missed to provide greater experience of the world of work for older students. Students make a good contribution to the community, including participating enthusiastically in the school community activities and the school council, because they are committed to the school and because the opportunities are provided and encouraged. Many pupils are forthright in their views and their confidence and skills in communication are vigorously encouraged.

Pupils have a wide range of ability but generally their attainment is exceptionally low because of their special educational needs. Pupils join the school with exceptionally low attainment but make good progress as they pass through the school. Boys and girls from all backgrounds achieve well and, depending on their starting point, gain a wide range of suitable accreditation, which is well matched to their needs.

The good teaching and learning at all key stages lead to the good progress and achievement for pupils of all ages and abilities. Teaching and learning are characterised by close team working of staff and the strong contribution of Student Support Assistants and Higher Level Teaching Assistants, good relationships between staff and pupils and excellent encouragement of communication and independence. However, activities in lessons are sometimes not as practical and participatory as they could be.

In the good curriculum, appropriate, challenging activities give opportunities for pupils to achieve as high a level of independence as possible and to communicate to the fullest level of their ability. Physical activities are very well provided for and greatly enjoyed by pupils. The curriculum is very well supplemented by a wide range of activities outside school time. However, opportunities for cultural development, including experience of different cultures, are not systematically planned.

Good leadership and management of the whole school by key staff provide a clear direction to which staff fully subscribe and recent restructuring of staff roles enhances this. Targets are challenging and the process of setting them is thoughtful and thorough. The good support of governors combines commitment, criticism and encouragement. The school has made good progress since its last inspection and is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form offers good provision and is led with great enthusiasm and commitment. Students progress well and achieve well, gaining accreditation that is well suited to their varying levels of attainment. Good personal development and well-being is encouraged by the good care, guidance and support provided. Although the school has made efforts to secure work placements, more could still be done to provide students with greater contact with the world of work. Teachers find creative new ways to present lessons when material has to be revisited, and Higher Level Teaching Assistants are well deployed and make a valuable contribution. The good curriculum is practical, appropriate and flexible.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

When the school had its last CSCI visit, several national minimum standards were not met relating to the school's accommodation and staffing levels. Since that time, the school has improved staffing, allowing better liaison between teachers and others, but staffing levels are still too low. The school has mitigated some of the effects of the accommodation, for example, by improving pupils' privacy, although there remains scope for further improvement. Pupils are well cared for, feel safe and are properly supervised. Child protection procedures are robust. Provision for personal development is good and pupils enjoy a wide range of well planned activities that are educative or enhance their leisure.

What the school should do to improve further

- Enhance staffing levels in the boarding provision to ensure all pupils have full privacy and access to the full range of activities.
- Develop older students' understanding of the world of work through opportunities to visit work places and by other means.
- Improve cultural development by systematic planning of cultural and multicultural opportunities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' attainments vary widely but are generally exceptionally low because of their special educational needs and their exceptionally low starting points. However, they make good progress as they pass through the school at all key stages and achieve well. Pupils make good progress towards challenging targets that are informed by high expectations and the particular difficulties of the individual pupil. Depending on their starting point, this means that students leave school with suitable qualifications that reflect this good progress and include Entry Level, National Vocational Qualifications, City and Guilds, GCSEs and, where appropriate, A level qualifications, the latter being delivered in mainstream settings.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Spiritual, moral and social development is good and cultural development satisfactory. Pupils take every opportunity for independence and make the most of it. They have strong opinions that they voice by whatever means of communication they prefer and they are careful to be fair. Pupils show outstanding enjoyment of their schooling and all the opportunities it affords. They behave well and show pride in their school and what it has helped them to achieve. Their attendance is good. The pupils relish challenges, especially sporting and physical ones, and engage in a wide range of activities relevant to their age and interests. Pupils take care of themselves and each other to the best of their ability and are sensitive and supportive, especially if any pupils are feeling low. They have an exceptional awareness of the need for a healthy diet and they make sensible choices. Pupils raise money for charity and are aware of those in need in the wider world. Pupils on the school council take their responsibilities very seriously and have effected important changes, for example, to the student common room. However, not all activities are available to all pupils because staffing levels do not always guarantee this. While students are well prepared for economic well-being through their ability to communicate, they have too few opportunities to observe the working environments outside school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning is good throughout all the key stages and there is some outstanding practice and a little that is satisfactory. Among the common strengths of teaching and learning are the close team working of teachers with Student Support Assistants and Higher Level Teaching Assistants and the good contribution of these assistants. There are very good opportunities for pupils to show independence and there are good relationships between pupils and staff. Work is well matched to the needs of different groups, and the very good use of communication aids contributes strongly to good achievement and to personal development. Just occasionally, pupils are set tasks that are not as relevant and as practical as they could be and opportunities are missed to use visual aids to enliven a lesson.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The good curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant and meets the needs of pupils because of careful planning. Access to the curriculum is excellent through the provision of individualised communication aids that are used consistently by staff. The integration of physical management programmes, therapy and academic courses is seamless, saving time, minimising frustration and representing very efficient use of resources. Sporting opportunities are excellent, providing pupils with a high degree of challenge and contributing positively to good social and personal development and a healthy lifestyle. Good provision for personal, social and health education gives opportunities to pupils to discuss sensitive issues.

While the curriculum provides well for spiritual, social and moral development, opportunities for cultural development, including experience of different cultures, are not sufficiently systematically planned for.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The good care, guidance and support are reflected in the very positive views of parents that the school offers a safe and caring environment. Provision of, and access to, medical care is outstanding. Robust procedures are in place to ensure health and safety and for risk assessments. The employment of staff and the safeguarding of children meet current government guidelines. Pupils are actively encouraged to be outspoken and to be as independent as possible, contributing to higher self-esteem. All pupils have a number of trusted staff to whom they can talk and whose advice they respect. They receive good advice, support and guidance for their future, both academically and personally. The process of setting targets and reviews of progress, both academic and personal, are consistently used and effectively shared with pupils. However, although the preparation for college or care placements is good, opportunities to experience the world of work are not as well developed as they could be.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Good leadership and management at all levels set a clear direction for the school to which all staff are committed as a strong and cohesive team. The recent restructuring is having a positive impact on raising standards and better coordinating the work of staff. Targets are challenging and are used well to raise standards, drawing on close knowledge of individual pupils and their prior attainment. School self-evaluation provides an accurate picture of the school and the school's judgements agreed with those of the inspectors, except for personal development and well-being and boarding provision, for which the school's judgements were too generous. The governing body provides good challenge to school leaders, while staff working in administrative capacities provide valuable support for the school. Tracking of pupils' progress is in place for the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, and personal and social development is assessed for younger pupils. The school does not, however, have in place a comprehensive assessment system for personal development for older pupils. It is in the process of developing this.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

6 October 2007

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Valence School, Westerham, TN16 1QN

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when my colleague Mary Vallis and I recently inspected your school. We both appreciated your important contribution to the inspection.

We found many good things about Valence School. It is a good school which is well led and managed, where teaching and learning is good, you benefit from a good curriculum and you are well supported and cared for. You make good progress academically and in your personal development. Your sixth form is good. You told us that you felt staff work with you well and you feel deeply involved in school life.

There are some things that can be improved. We have asked the school to:

- Improve staffing levels in the boarding provision to make sure all boarders have full privacy and access to the full range of activities offered.
- Develop older students' understanding of the world of work, for example, by giving you more opportunities to visit work places.
- Improve your cultural development by planning more opportunities for you to learn about your own and other cultures.

We both wish you well for your future and thank you again.

Yours sincerely

Michael Farrell Lead inspector

6 October 2007

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Michael Farrell
Lead inspector