
Inspection of Valley Park School

Huntsman Lane, Maidstone, Kent ME14 5DT

Inspection dates: 4–5 March 2020

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The previous 'outstanding' judgement reflected the school's overall effectiveness in April 2013 under the relevant inspection framework at that time.

The new judgement of 'good' reflects the current inspection framework as well as any changes at the school since the last inspection.

The school has not been inspected for seven years, which is longer than the five-year maximum interval between inspections. Changes in school effectiveness may have happened at any point in that period. The long time between inspections is because the law changed in 2011; it made outstanding schools exempt from routine inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Valley Park School take their learning very seriously. They work hard in their lessons, always trying their best. Teachers have high expectations of what each pupil should achieve. They make sure that pupils receive the right guidance to help them succeed.

Pupils' behaviour is of a very high standard. They mix well with each other, showing mutual respect. As a result, the community is one where bullying seldom happens. If it does happen, most pupils are confident that staff will resolve the problem. A few are not so sure that all teachers will act in the same consistent way.

Most pupils feel happy and safe at school. They know where they can go if they need help. Some pupils feel that they would like more support to deal with what worries them.

Pupils have a wide range of activities on offer. Teachers encourage them to take part in giving back to the community. An example of this is the very successful 'Dementia Café'. Pupils themselves run this event for people affected by the condition. Pupils also love taking part in the frequent drama productions. The recent performance of 'Legally Blonde' had been a huge success, pupils told us.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The headteacher took up her post at the beginning of the academic year. She straightaway set about making improvements to the school's curriculum. Leaders have carried out a thorough revision of all subject plans. They have focused on improving the level of challenge in what pupils learn. They have also ensured that the curriculum is broad and has a logical sequence. Pupils study a wide range of subjects. Leaders ensure that all pupils cover the full key stage 3 curriculum over their first two years at the school. Leaders have also insisted on a broad curriculum for all at key stage 4. A high proportion of pupils study the GCSE subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The school ensures that pupils can also take vocational and arts subjects as well. Indeed, these are some of the most successful areas of the curriculum.

Leaders have worked well to get the curriculum to this point. Leaders' key priority now is to ensure that pupils remember and use the knowledge they learn. They are supporting teachers to do this through targeted professional development. Teachers are sharpening their questioning and have introduced strategies to improve pupils' reading skills and widen their vocabulary. These improvements are at an early stage and delivery is not yet consistent.

Pupils are diligent and conscientious in their lessons. All pupils conduct themselves with maturity. Teachers have strong subject knowledge which gives pupils confidence in what they learn. Teachers check for gaps in understanding. Pupils act well on feedback they receive. This is a strength of the school's practice. Most pupils

achieve well, acting on suggestions for improvement. Leaders have had a positive impact on pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff have achieved this through thoughtful and well-judged support. However, disadvantaged pupils do not make the progress that they should. Leaders have plans to tackle this, but they have yet to put these strategies into action.

The school offers a wide range of personal development opportunities. For instance, pupils have access to a farm on site. They are also able to take part in a host of sports and arts events. Despite this rich offer, less than half of the pupils take part. As a result, leaders have made it a priority to encourage more participation. Although the school offers varied activities, there are still some gaps. For instance, pupils do not receive enough guidance about equality and diversity.

The sixth form is a strength of the school. Students have a broad set of courses to choose from. The teaching is strong, and students show mature commitment to their studies. As a result, they have achieved very well in their examinations. Students speak highly of the careers guidance they receive. They are very successful in reaching ambitious destinations.

Leaders are well respected by staff. They share the vision for the school that the headteacher has shaped with them. Staff say that leaders show consideration about their well-being and workload. Governors check and support leaders' impact on the school's priorities. Trust leaders ensure that the school has the resources it needs to improve. All leaders are aware that a key priority is to engage more pupils in the wider life of the school. Thereby making sure that all pupils feel satisfied by their experience at school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have appropriate systems in place for safeguarding. Records for those who work at the school are well organised. Staff have all been trained to spot the signs to look out for if they are worried about a pupil. The safeguarding team have plenty of experience working with pupils and their families. They know their responsibilities and work together to support the needs of vulnerable pupils. Leaders place an increasing emphasis on support for pupils with mental health issues.

While safeguarding processes are secure, some pupils said that they would like better opportunities to voice their concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum is not yet fully coherently planned and sequenced in some subjects. However, it is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken to plan the curriculum and train staff in how to deliver it that they are in the process

of bringing this about. Leaders need to check, monitor and adjust where necessary to consolidate and secure the intended improvements in the curriculum delivery. For this reason, the transition arrangement has been applied in this case.

- Leaders have made clear their intention to raise the level of achievement for all pupils, but especially for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have had early impact on reducing the absence rate for this group of pupils. Now the priority is to put in place a set of actions that will result in better outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Many pupils are positively engaged in the wider life of the school. They feel safe and well supported. However, there is a minority who are not so well engaged and do not feel happy. Leaders need to act to help these pupils to participate and feel proud to belong to Valley Park so that they widen their horizons and develop themselves as individuals.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	136581
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10133089
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,620
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	308
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Nick Ware
Headteacher	M Hutchinson
Website	www.valleypark.viat.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	18–19 April 2013

Information about this school

- The current headteacher has been in post since September 2019. The senior leadership team has undergone significant changes which have been put in place since February 2020.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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- I reviewed the school's safeguarding arrangements. I looked at relevant documentation, staff recruitment checks and training. I also considered how well adults in the school act on emerging concerns about pupil welfare.
- We spoke with pupils, parents and staff to gather their views. We considered 310 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 544 submissions to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire and 89 staff survey replies.
- We held meetings with members of the local school board and with the trust's chief executive officer.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, art and modern foreign languages. This involved talking with senior leaders, subject leaders and class teachers about how these subjects are delivered. Inspectors then visited a range of lessons to see this in action, talked to pupils about what they have learned and looked at their work.

Inspection team

Yasmin Maskatiya, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Steve Baker	Ofsted Inspector
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Anne Turner	Ofsted Inspector

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