

Inspection of Valence School

Westerham Road, Westerham, Kent TN16 1QN

Inspection dates: 3–4 December 2019

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a friendly, welcoming school. Smiles and positive attitudes can be seen everywhere at Valence. Staff know pupils incredibly well. Pupils are safe, very well cared for and treated with the utmost respect. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and bullying extremely rare.

Pupils get precisely the right support to develop their communication and independence. As a result, pupils of all ages are extremely confident. A pupil expressed the views of many, explaining: 'This school is amazing!'

Reflecting the confidence that they develop, pupils enjoy showcasing their talents in the community. Some recently performed 'Much Ado About Nothing' at Leatherhead Theatre. Others achieve sporting success, coming fifth in the national table-cricket competition.

Pupils are rightly very proud of their achievements. Sixth-form pupils told us about their plans for their future. They knowledgeably discussed what their options are and what needs to happen to achieve their goals.

Pupils know that their views are important to leaders. School council members help to interview staffing candidates. Pupils explained clearly the qualities they look for when they recruit. Pupils know how this work will help them in adult life. Some explained how they will use these skills when employing their own personal assistants in the future.

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

Leaders and governors have diligently improved Valence. This is now a good school. Leaders and staff are highly ambitious for pupils to succeed. Pupils rise to the challenge. They achieve well and gain the qualifications and skills they need to make a successful transition when they leave the school. Proficient staff work closely with other professionals to understand pupils' very specific special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in detail.

The school's work to support pupils' personal development is outstanding. Many parents are full of praise for the school's work in this area. Pupils receive highly personalised support at lunchtimes, for example. Staff and therapists work well together to promote pupils' independence. They skilfully meet pupils' often complex medical and personal care needs. From the early years, pupils quickly learn to communicate their needs and preferences. By the time they reach the sixth form, many pupils are confidently able to advocate for themselves, for example, by using their consumer rights to make a complaint to a shop, which successfully resulted in a refund.

Reading and communication is a top priority for the school. In the early years, staff swiftly introduce children to phonics through well-planned activities. For example,

children had great fun finding letters hidden in the pasta tray and learning to make the corresponding sounds. Phonics is taught effectively throughout the school. Approaches to teaching are carefully adapted to meet pupils' individual needs. Pupils read every day. Older pupils discussed the type of books they like to read. Dickens was a firm favourite for many because they are enjoying studying 'A Christmas Carol' in English.

Pupils' learning has been sensibly reorganised into distinct 'pathways'. In some subjects, such as in English, computing and physical education (PE), teachers know exactly what to teach in the right order because plans are very clear. In these subjects, plans describe well the knowledge and skills to teach in each 'pathway' and for pupils of all ages and stages of development. However, in some other subjects, learning is not yet planned in precisely the same detail across the whole school. Additionally, leadership of some subjects does not always have a firm enough grasp of learning across the whole school.

In some subjects, such as English and mathematics, teachers use assessment effectively to check pupils' understanding and plan future learning. However, in some foundation subjects, assessment is not used as well. Sometimes, for example, assessment considers whether pupils have completed activities, rather than precisely evaluating the knowledge and skills that pupils have learned.

Pupils behave extremely well. The school is a calm and well-organised place in which to learn. Pupils move sensibly around the school site. Relationships between adults and pupils are consistently strong. Pupils are exceptionally kind and caring towards each other. They show great respect for each other's differences. Pupils told us they feel that they belong here. Leaders have made positive links with medical professionals to bring clinics into school. As a result, pupils do not miss too much time from school to attend appointments.

Staff told us that they are proud to work at this school. They feel united in their commitment to provide the very best for pupils. One explained, 'We are all here for the same reason.' Training is carefully planned to support staff to develop their skills and expertise. Staff like the termly 'Friday well-being sessions' that leaders have recently introduced. Leaders regularly check in with staff to discuss their work and well-being.

Leaders are continually looking for ways to improve their communication with parents. The school is working towards an external accreditation in parental partnership. Some parents told us they would like to get more information about their child's learning. Leaders and governors are working together effectively to strengthen this aspect of the school's work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained and know exactly what they need to do to keep pupils safe.

They have a clear understanding of the specific vulnerabilities of pupils at Valence. They are vigilant and look out for any changes in behaviour that might suggest that a pupil is not safe.

Staff report any concerns about a pupil's welfare appropriately. Leaders respond promptly. They work closely with other professionals to help keep pupils safe.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe online. Pupils explained how they would tell an adult immediately if someone they did not know tried to contact them online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' overview of some subjects, such as English and computing, includes a clear picture of learning across the whole school and across all three of the school's curriculum 'pathways'. However, this is not the case for all subjects. Leaders need to ensure that they have a clear overview of learning across the whole school, for all subjects and curriculum pathways.
- Some subjects are carefully planned and sequenced, such as English, computing and PE. However, this is not the case in all subjects. Leaders need to continue to develop the planning of foundation subjects so that knowledge and skills are coherently planned and sequenced. It is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken to develop the curriculum further, and to train staff in how to deliver it, that they are in the process of bringing this about.
- In English and mathematics, teachers and leaders use assessment well to check pupils' understanding of knowledge and skills. They use this information to plan future learning successfully. However, the use of assessment in the foundation subjects is not as well developed. Leaders need to ensure that assessment of knowledge and skills in the foundation subjects is used effectively, so that teaching helps pupils to build upon and remember their learning.

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're 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	119032
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10111124
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	102
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	27
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Brian Davies
Headteacher	Roland Gooding
Website	www.valenceschool.com
Date of previous inspection	18–19 July 2017

Information about this school

- Valence is a special school which caters for pupils from the ages of 4 to 19 years.
- Valence provides for pupils with physical disabilities. Pupils may also have moderate or severe learning difficulties. Many pupils have complex health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school was not using any alternative provision at the time of this inspection.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We met with senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and support staff.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, art and history. We also considered learning in computing and PE. We discussed the curriculum

design with subject leaders, carried out a series of lesson visits, scrutinised pupils' work and spoke to pupils and teachers about the curriculum.

- We evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding. The school's single central record was reviewed. An inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead, scrutinised documentation, including a sample of case files, and spoke to pupils and staff.
- The lead inspector met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector met with a representative from the local authority.
- We met with pupils to discuss their views about the school and talked to pupils informally about the school. There were 15 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- We took account of the 43 responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey, and 19 additional free-text responses. An inspector met with some parents of children in the early years class.
- We considered the views of 67 members of staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Claire Prince, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Hogarth

Ofsted Inspector

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