



SELF-EVALUATION

Document

(SEF) Sept 2027 V1

The Valley School

- **'A warm and caring centre of excellence, providing a safe and supportive environment where every student develops the knowledge, skills, confidence and independence to thrive in adulthood, employment and their community'.**

Whole School Goals

- ▶ **A place of security, safety and happiness where:**
- ▶ **Every student achieves their potential**
- ▶ **Every lesson every day is good or better**
- ▶ **High quality CPD is available for every member of staff**
- ▶ **There is 360 Degree wrap around care for every child and their families.**

Characteristics of the school

- The Valley School is a special school for students in Key Stages 3 and 4 with learning difficulties. All students have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
- In recent years, the school's intake has changed. Due to lack of places in neighbouring SEMH provisions, it now accepts an increasing number of students experiencing social, emotional and mental ill health.
- Currently there are 201 students on roll.
- Due to an in-year financial deficit we have increase the agreed number to 190 to help counteract this. We have more students than our agreed number due to tribunals. This has meant a rise from 155 to 201 in three years.
- We moved into our new build in January 2024.
- A large majority of our students are from areas of high deprivation. According to the Government Deprivation Indicators, students live in areas with a mean deprivation of 58% with 45% having no or low qualifications.
- Approximately 50% of our students have an SEMH diagnosis and x% have EAL.
- The attendance of our SEMH students compare favourably/unfavourably when compared with other students.
- The school has a high Student Premium Eligible percentage compared to other local schools in Hertfordshire. This is currently at 50.5%
- Currently 10 students are in the care of the local authority.
- External alternative provision is available to students in all years, where necessary.
- The school also has strong links with the nearby Barnwell School, North Herts Educational Support Centre, North Herts College, other Hertfordshire special schools and the local DSPL, all of which help to support its work and provide greater learning opportunities for students.

Safeguarding (Met)

Safeguarding is **highly effective and deeply embedded** within the culture of the school. Leaders have established an **open and transparent safeguarding ethos** where all staff understand that “it could happen here” and take collective responsibility for keeping students safe. **Staff are vigilant, confident, and well-trained, consistently applying school systems and procedures with accuracy and urgency.** Regular and comprehensive CPD ensures that staff understand the signs of possible safeguarding concerns and respond appropriately, including child-on-child abuse, online risks, and contextual safeguarding issues.

Strategic oversight is **robust and continuous**. Leaders monitor safeguarding through weekly DSL meetings, governor scrutiny, and systematic audits, ensuring that policies, systems, and processes remain under constant review and improvement. Multi-agency working is **timely and effective**, evidenced by strong partnerships with external agencies, Early Help referrals, and positive feedback from the Local Authority. Leaders actively learn from safeguarding cases and implement changes where needed to strengthen practice further.

Students, including those who are CLA, LA, and PP, consistently report that they feel safe and know who to approach if they are worried. Their voices are heard through regular student surveys, parent questionnaires, and safeguarding audits, and these inform ongoing improvements.

Student questionnaire states that they feel safe, supported and are rewarded for good work. They know who they can turn to if they need help. (Oct 2025) -

Parent questionnaire states that their child feels safe, supported and are rewarded for good work. They know who they can turn to if they need help. (Dec 2025)

Intimidation will be dealt with effectively. (Staff feedback questionnaire Oct 2025)

Governors' minutes show very low levels of bullying that are effectively addressed.

Online safety is fully integrated into the curriculum and reinforced through PSCH lessons, assemblies, and parent workshops, ensuring students understand how to stay safe in a digital world.

Leaders fulfil all statutory responsibilities, including safer recruitment, reporting and referrals, record keeping, and compliance with the Prevent duty. Policies and procedures are clear, accessible, and regularly reviewed. The Single Central Record is meticulously maintained, and safer recruitment practices are rigorous. Governors provide strong challenge and oversight, with the safeguarding governor conducting regular monitoring visits and reporting to the full governing body.

The safeguarding culture is further strengthened by **robust risk assessments**, site security checks, and staff conduct monitoring. Leaders ensure staff receive **appropriate supervision** and support, and any concerns about adults are managed in line with local authority procedures. Evidence of impact is demonstrated through training records, DSL meeting minutes, case files, curriculum plans, and governor reports.

Next Steps

Continue to monitor CPOMS and safeguarding data termly.

- Maintain training cycle for all staff.
- Engage staff and parent voice on safety each term.
- Regularly review safer recruitment and record-keeping procedures.

Inclusion (Exceptional)

Exceptional standards of inclusion have been sustained over time at The Valley School. Barriers to learning and well-being for all students—including disadvantaged students, those with SEND, those known to children's social care, and those facing other challenges—are reduced exceptionally well, ensuring highly positive outcomes and experiences across all areas of school life. Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on how well students achieve and thrive, and they ensure that every student feels a strong sense of belonging within our school community. There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

Our curriculum is deliberately designed to be inclusive and ambitious, recognising the diverse needs of students on entry. We provide four distinct pathways: Formal (for students where academic attainment is the greatest priority), Semi-Formal (where social and emotional development is as important as academic progress), Informal (where preparation for independent living after school is the focus) and Nurture (Supporting and developing students with the most complex needs). Pathways are reviewed regularly and adjusted to ensure students receive the right level of challenge and support. Bespoke timetables are implemented for students with spiky profiles, and alternative provisions are offered for those whose learning behaviours impact others, maintaining engagement and attendance.

From the moment students arrive, our culture is to **prepare them for adulthood**. Alongside the core curriculum, we deliver an additional programme focused on life skills, including **road safety through daily controlled practice** and **financial literacy via our reward system**, which teaches students to earn, save, and spend responsibly. Our Year 6–7 transition process is **exceptionally thorough**: every student is visited in their current setting, relationships with families are built early, and parents and students are encouraged to attend open mornings and transition evenings. The Headteacher personally visits feeder schools to share expectations and support families.

We have a dedicated **Interventions Team**, led by an Interventions Lead, delivering bespoke programmes for students who need additional support. Our SENCo works closely with the Exams Officer to ensure all students receive appropriate access arrangements. Staff training is **comprehensive and informed by learning walks**, ensuring staff are equipped to meet the needs of our learners. The student premium strategy is **evidence-based, monitored, and adapted for impact**, with meaningful engagement of parents and students in decision-making.

Our inclusive approach is underpinned by **rigorous monitoring of progress and well-analysed quantitative and qualitative data**, enabling leaders to swiftly address barriers and adjust strategies for sustained impact. Exceptional practice is recognised beyond our school: **we regularly host visitors from other schools—three or four times each term—who come to see best practice in action and gain support**, reflecting our commitment to sharing learning and driving **system-wide improvement**. Recent parent survey results (December 2025) show **100% of respondents feel their child is happy in school, and 94% agree that we understand their child's needs**.

Next Steps

- Monitor PP progress data termly.
- Review and refine graduated approach.
- Engage parents/carers in reviews.
- Share best practice with county networks.
- Monitor attendance weekly and act early on PA.
- Review rewards system to ensure students feel valued.
- Maintain therapeutic behaviour training for staff.
- Continue work towards RRSA Gold with mapped milestones

Curriculum and Teaching (Strong)

A small number of refinements remain: ensuring LSAs consistently support specific learning targets, and strengthening clarity in five-minute lesson plans to demonstrate progression from prior learning.

Leaders' evaluations were fully aligned, demonstrating increased accuracy and confidence in self-evaluation.

Joint learning walks demonstrated highly effective vocabulary teaching, purposeful practical activities, strong assessment evidence and well-matched adaptations for pupils with SEND.

External validation (HFL SEA Visit – 11 May 2026) confirms that teaching is consistently strong across all lessons observed, with nearly all elements of the lesson observation criteria securely met.

External validation (HFL Improvement Partner – 2 March 2026) confirms that curriculum intent is strong and that teaching consistently meets expectations across safeguarding, inclusion, engagement, behaviour, assessment and personal development. Learning walks jointly undertaken with senior and middle leaders showed that most aspects of curriculum and teaching quality are securely embedded and align closely with leaders' self-evaluation.

The visit also identified "specific refinements required to secure consistent high-quality practice in every lesson". In a small number of lessons, learning intentions were not always sufficiently clear, visible or accessible; the learning of a small number of cognitively more able students was not extended consistently; and there was some variability in the explicit teaching and reinforcement of subject-specific vocabulary. Leaders agree that, while overall practice is strong, these factors currently limit the evidence base for the highest evaluative judgement.

Actions taken and impact:

Following February 2026 whole-staff training, leaders have acted swiftly. Clear learning intentions and explicit vocabulary instruction are now non-negotiables within planning and learning walks. Expectations for stretch and extension within each pathway have been sharpened. Lesson observation documentation has been refined to include a 'Not Applicable' option where elements do not apply within

semi-formal or informal pathways. Early follow-up monitoring shows greater consistency in lesson clarity, improved evaluative dialogue around vocabulary, and increased staff confidence when articulating curriculum intent and impact.

Leaders make astute decisions about how the curriculum and teaching adapt and evolve, based on robust evidence (assessment, learning walks, work scrutiny and progress data) of how well students have learned what was intended. Leaders ensure the curriculum is consistently high quality across subjects and year groups, with a sophisticated understanding of subject differences so that learning at each stage is secured quickly and shaped carefully in anticipation of future learning.

Our curriculum is **broad, ambitious and well sequenced** across four pathways—**Formal** (academic attainment is the greatest priority), **Semi-Formal** (social and emotional development alongside academic progress), **Informal** (preparation for independent living is the focus), and **Nurture** (for students with the most complex needs). Pathways are **reviewed regularly**, with **straightforward transitions** where appropriate, and **bespoke timetables** for students with **spiky profiles** to remove barriers and maximise progress. **Highly effective teaching is embedded** across subjects and phases; teachers are **experts in their disciplines** and **consistently make highly effective choices** about what to teach, and when and how to teach it, within the context of each subject, phase and student's needs.

Middle and Senior leaders monitor teaching and learning by completing twenty-eight Learning Walks every two weeks. **These demonstrate that highly effective teaching is embedded across all subjects and phases.**

"All students engaged in appropriately adapted activities."

"All students were fully engaged and demonstrated a genuine enthusiasm for learning."

"Students were able to use the technical key words when describing their projects to me."

"Fantastic concentration from all students."

"A challenging activity for these students (Orange), however all students were able to achieve and were obviously proud of their work."

"Lovely calm, purposeful lesson. You put a lot of emphasis on independence, encouraging students to answer their own questions and choose their own supporting resources (e.g. manipulatives)."

Reading is prioritised and taught systematically, with gaps closed swiftly. We deploy a dedicated reading/phonics teacher and a dedicated numeracy teacher to identify and fill foundational gaps. Phonics and numeracy support are targeted precisely

where needed. Across subjects, teaching ensures students consistently develop language and vocabulary (spoken and written) and increase reading competency, including through theme-led learning (e.g., *Farm to Fork*, *World War II*, *Chocolate*, *Gaming*) which motivates learners who have historically struggled and makes abstract content concrete. There is wide use of manipulatives to deepen conceptual understanding, particularly in mathematics and science.

Assessment is used formatively and summatively to inform teaching, secure learning and embed knowledge in long-term memory, with adaptations carefully planned and consistently implemented for disadvantaged students, and those known (or previously known) to children's social care, and others who may face barriers in addition to SEND. Our approach to curriculum and teaching for these students is implemented consistently well across the school to remove barriers to achievement. Preparing for adulthood is fully embedded within the curriculum, giving meaning and context to learning (e.g., daily road safety routines and financial literacy through our rewards/banking system).

Our PSCH curriculum is robust and accessed by all groups, including CLA (Children Looked After), LA, and PP (Student Premium), with impact evidenced through curriculum maps, lesson evaluations, and impact reports. Awe and wonder are embedded through trips, visits and enrichment—performing at the Royal Albert Hall, working with the Musical Director of *The Lion King*, training with an international rugby player, and participating in whole-school shows and seasonal celebrations—with evidence in Enrichment Logs, Event Programmes, Photographic Evidence, and enrichment commentary. Exceptional practice in curriculum and teaching is recognised beyond our school: we regularly host visitors from other schools (three to four times per term) to see best practice in action and receive support.

Leaders are developing an expanded vocational curriculum offer for introduction from September 2027. Vocational pathways including Catering, Hair and Beauty, Construction Skills and Barista Training will provide students with practical, accredited learning opportunities closely linked to local employment sectors. Curriculum planning ensures that employability skills, enterprise and preparation for adulthood are woven throughout all pathways

Next Steps

- Biweekly learning walks and Poppins
- Embed reading culture with vertical reading groups.
- Monitor impact of CPD on teaching quality
- Refine curriculum maps and sequencing in subjects identified for development
- Embed new Numeracy programme across the school, ensuring comprehensive support for non-specialists
- Ensure all Phonics teaching is structured, accumulative and sequential.
- Develop a consistency in assessment for learning, long and medium-term planning across the school.
- Initiate curriculum, resources and infrastructure for new vocational pathways.

Achievement (Strong)

Students, including disadvantaged students, those known to children's social care, and those facing other barriers, **consistently achieve well** and make **excellent progress from their starting points**, not only academically but also socially and emotionally. They develop **detailed knowledge and skills** and produce **high-quality work** across the curriculum, supported by a broad, ambitious and inclusive curriculum tailored to individual needs.

Despite being a school for students with learning difficulties, achievement is exceptional: some students with diagnosed cognitive delay **sit and achieve GCSEs and Level 2 qualifications such as BTECs**, while others make transformational progress in personal development—selective mutes now communicate confidently, students who could not use the toilet independently now do so, non-readers become fluent readers, and children who previously could not leave home now eat out with their families. students who were too shy to enter a classroom now perform in whole-school productions.

Preparation for adulthood is embedded throughout the curriculum. **All students are consistently well prepared for the next stage of education, employment or training:** Year 11 students attend college weekly, and for the past four years we have had zero NEETs. Every student undertakes tailored work experience, and scaffolds such as one-to-one support are gradually removed so students leave us able to thrive independently. **Travel training, financial literacy, and daily road safety routines** ensure students gain mobility, independence and life skills. The planned expansion of vocational pathways and extended work experience opportunities will **further enhance** outcomes for students by providing recognised industry-specific skills and increased opportunities to apply learning in real-world contexts. Students will be increasingly prepared for sustainable post-16 destinations and future employment

Achievement is measured not only by qualifications but by life-changing outcomes. Our rigorous assessment and monitoring systems ensure gaps close quickly, and students' progress is sustained across all areas of school life. These outcomes demonstrate that barriers to learning and well-being are reduced exceptionally well, and students leave The Valley School equipped for success in adulthood.

Next Steps

- Termly data drops and progress meetings.
- Implement targeted interventions where progress dips.
- Celebrate success through assemblies and rewards.
- Continue to raise expectations for formal qualifications where appropriate
- Track scaffold removal to support independence towards post-16 readiness

Attendance and Behaviour (Exceptional)

SEA learning walks confirmed that classrooms are calm, purposeful and highly engaging, with pupils consistently meeting expectations for behaviour and engagement across all observed lessons.

Exceptional standards of attendance and behaviour have been **sustained over time**, creating a **highly inclusive culture where all Students feel they belong**. Leaders' actions have a **transformational impact** on how well disadvantaged Students, those with SEND, those known to children's social care, and those facing other barriers **achieve and flourish across all areas of school life**. There are **no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised**.

Behaviour is **exemplary**. Relationships between staff and Students—and among Students themselves—are exceptionally positive, fostering respect, kindness and cooperation. There is a **palpable sense of calm, purpose and joy** across the school, inspiring **awe and wonder** and enabling **students to thrive**. Records from our twenty-eight Learning walks that take place every two weeks provide clear evidence of this.

"Engagement levels are consistently high"

"Students effectively led the lesson."

"All students were fully engaged"

"Students were enthusiastic in their learning."

"Lovely, calm and purposeful atmosphere."

Bullying and harassment are never tolerated and are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Positive learning behaviours are embedded, resulting in extremely low incidents of disruption, which are always managed promptly and consistently. This

culture enables stretch and challenge in lessons and contributes to improved academic outcomes.

Attendance is **above national averages**, and persistent absence continues to **reduce over time**. From their starting points, **student attendance consistently improves** whilst at The Valley School. Students who need additional support receive **exceptional, tailored interventions from highly skilled staff**, with perceptible results. Children enjoy coming to school and feel safe, as confirmed by **student voice surveys, parent feedback and attendance data**. Our commitment to inclusion ensures that students with complex needs are supported to attend and engage fully.

The impact of this culture extends beyond the classroom: Students demonstrate confidence and teamwork through **sporting achievements, performing arts**, and enrichment activities such as **whole-school shows** and **student-led bands**. Successes are celebrated through **assemblies, newsletters and whole-school events**, reinforcing pride and belonging. Visitors consistently comment on the calm, purposeful atmosphere during **learning walks and inspections**, and behaviour was identified as a strength at the last Ofsted inspection.

Our outward-facing leadership reflects this exceptional practice: we **regularly host visitors from other schools to share best practice and support system-wide improvement**. Leaders have clear actions to sustain exemplary standards and continue to benchmark against Ofsted's highest criteria. For the past four years, this culture has contributed to **zero NEETs**, demonstrating the link between attendance, behaviour and long-term success.

Next steps

- Continue Form Tutor mentoring and parental engagement.
- Target cohort at 85–95% to reach 95%+; maintain weekly attendance summaries to tutors/HOY
- Monitor attendance weekly and act early on PA.
- Review rewards system to ensure students feel valued.
- Maintain therapeutic behaviour training for staff.

Personal Development and Well-being (Exceptional)

Exceptionally high standards of personal development and well-being have been **sustained over time**, creating a culture where students feel **safe, supported and valued**, and where they make a **strong positive contribution to our inclusive community**. Leaders' actions have a **transformational impact**, enabling disadvantaged students, those known to children's social care, and those facing other barriers than just SEND, to **thrive in school and beyond**. There are **no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised**. We can cite numerous case studies of life changing successes such as the one illustrated below.

This week, the Autism Specialist Advisory Team visited to observe Child x — and the feedback we received was nothing short of exceptional.

Our visiting specialist shared that she was **blown away** by the development and progression Child x has made since joining The Valley. She highlighted that the behaviours and traits previously observed across primary, secondary, and at home are now **non-existent**.

She observed Child x:

- Happily getting ready for school each morning
- Being social, talkative, and engaged with both peers and staff
- Learning with focus and confidence
- Sharing equipment, space, and resources with others
- Demonstrating none of the OCD-driven anxieties that once had such a strong influence

In fact, she had **no advisories at all**—a rare and powerful testament to the environment your team/all staff create each and every day. She said she simply *could not praise The Valley School enough*.

Our programme for personal development is **exciting, coherent and ambitious**, filling students with **awe and wonder** and preparing them exceptionally well for life in modern Britain. Opportunities are described by students as **brilliant and transformative**. Students are **confident, resilient and reflective**, consistently meeting the highest expectations for conduct and character. They understand and respect diversity, demonstrated through our **RRSA Silver Award** and commitment to achieving Gold, and they actively participate in a rich array of enrichment activities that inspire and motivate them.

SMSC provision is exceptionally strong and embedded across the curriculum, assemblies and wider school life. Our **PSCHE curriculum is robust and accessed by all groups**, including CLA, LA and PP, with impact evidenced through curriculum maps, lesson evaluations and reports. **Awe and wonder** are brought to life through **enrichment**

experiences such as performing at the **Royal Albert Hall**, working with the **Musical Director of *The Lion King***, training with an **international rugby player**, and participating in **whole-school shows and seasonal celebrations**. These experiences build cultural capital and confidence, supported by enrichment logs, event programmes and photographic evidence.

Careers education meets all Gatsby benchmarks and is rigorously evaluated. Year 11 students spend half a day per week in college for a year, supporting transition and vocational learning. All students access **tailored work experience placements**, and our strengthened post-16 strategy ensures **zero NEETs for four consecutive years**, with students now progressing to four different colleges compared to one previously. **Travel training, financial literacy and preparation for adulthood are fully embedded**, ensuring students leave us exceptionally well prepared for their next steps and for life beyond school.

Preparation for adulthood and employability have become key strengths of the school's personal development offer. Leaders have established a comprehensive employability strategy which ensures students develop the knowledge, skills and confidence required for adult life and **future employment**. Work experience opportunities have been expanded across both Years 10 and 11, enabling students to participate in meaningful workplace experiences over an extended period rather than through a single placement. This allows students to develop work-readiness skills, independence, communication and resilience in authentic settings.

Residential experiences form an important element of this strategy. Students in Years 10 and 11 participate in residential opportunities designed specifically to develop confidence, independence, problem-solving, teamwork and resilience. These experiences contribute significantly to students' personal growth and **prepare them exceptionally well for life beyond school**.

Leaders have strengthened careers education through the development of an in-house careers and post-16 guidance service. Appropriately trained staff provide impartial careers advice, transition planning and support for students and families throughout Key Stage 4. This ensures that careers guidance is **highly personalised and fully aligned** with students' EHCP outcomes, aspirations and individual pathways.

The school is actively developing an **ambitious vocational offer** for implementation from September 2027. Planned pathways include Catering, Hair and Beauty, Construction Skills, including Bricklaying and Plastering, and Barista Training, alongside other vocational qualifications identified through student interest and labour market information. These developments will further strengthen the school's commitment to preparing students for adulthood and supporting **successful progression into further education, training and employment**. As a result, students leave The **Valley exceptionally well equipped** with the confidence, skills and experiences required to succeed in modern society.

Our inclusive ethos pervades everything we do, supported by strong safeguarding partnerships, including our PCSO, and confirmed by **student voice surveys, parent feedback and equalities monitoring reports**. Visitors and inspectors consistently comment on the **calm, purposeful and joyful atmosphere**, and our outward-facing leadership regularly shares best practice with other schools to support system-wide improvement.

Next Steps

- Track participation in clubs, trips and cultural activities.
- Continue to meet all Gatsby Benchmarks.
- Expand student leadership opportunities (student ambassadors, sports leaders).
- Promote student mental health initiatives and wellbeing curriculum.

Leadership and Governance (Strong)

Revised documentation and observation processes were highlighted as a strength, directly supporting accurate SEF evaluation and school improvement planning.

The SEA visit (May 2026) validated the strength of leadership, noting that senior and middle leaders demonstrate precise, evidence-based evaluation and consistent agreement in judgements during joint observations.

Leaders provide **meaningful opportunities for staff and governors to share perspectives and collaborate** throughout change processes, ensuring decisions are transparent and inclusive. Self-evaluation is **accurate and insightful**, informed by detailed analysis of school performance and impact reports. Leaders **identify, monitor and act on priorities for improvement with precision**, resulting in consistently strong standards across all areas and rapid improvement where needed. There are **no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised**.

Leaders at all levels make a **consistently positive contribution** to school priorities and drive improvement through a culture of **high expectations and professionalism**. Staff understand their role in sustaining standards and are empowered through a **highly effective professional learning culture**, underpinned by a CPD programme informed by research and matched to whole-school, team and individual needs. This has led to exceptional workforce development: four LPs/UQTs have qualified as teachers in the past four years, with four more currently training, and numerous staff have progressed to senior leadership roles, including Deputy Headship and Headship. Staff retention is excellent, with departures only for promotion or retirement.

Governors provide **robust challenge and consistent support**, using their knowledge and expertise to hold leaders to account across all aspects of the school's work. **They are instrumental in self-evaluation and development planning**. They know the school well

through regular visits, attendance at student council and RRSA steering groups, and monitoring of achievement for all groups, including CLA, PP and LA. Governance impact is evidenced through visit reports, committee minutes and monitoring records.

Leadership has created a **highly inclusive culture** where safeguarding is prioritised and statutory requirements are met. Leaders ensure workload is manageable and staff well-being is supported. The school's reputation reflects this success: The Valley is oversubscribed and recognised as the special school of choice locally, with many requests from external professionals to visit and learn from our practice. Leaders regularly share best practice with other schools, supporting system-wide improvement.

Leaders have identified employability and preparation for adulthood as a key strategic priority for the next phase of school development. Plans are in place to establish specialist careers guidance provision, expand employer partnerships and develop new vocational learning environments. Governors monitor the impact of these developments through destination data, Gatsby Benchmark compliance, student outcomes and stakeholder feedback.

Next Steps

- Termly governor monitoring visits.
- Provide training for middle leaders to lead whole-school priorities.
- Continue to prioritise staff workload and wellbeing.
- Maintain accurate self-evaluation and improvement planning.
- Support the new Chair of Governors in his leadership role through induction, mentoring, and regular strategy meetings.