

# Severn Vale School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115726
<b>Local Authority</b>	Gloucestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	357807
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 January 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Merchant

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1170
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Fred Wood
<b>Headteacher</b>	Peter Rowland
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 June 2008
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 38 lessons and observed 37 teachers. They held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of students. They talked to some parents and carers who were present at the start and finish of the school day. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at its improvement plan, minutes of meetings held by the governing body, data on students' progress, records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, and a range of school policies. They analysed questionnaires received from 272 parents and carers and 126 students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Students' attainment and progress during Key Stage 4 and the extent to which the school meets the needs of all groups.
- How well the teaching takes account of the needs of different groups of students, and how well teachers help all students to improve their attainment and progress.
- The effectiveness of the curriculum in motivating and inspiring all students and providing challenge and interest for them.
- The effectiveness of middle leaders and the governing body in checking attainment, progress and teaching and contributing to the school's improvement.

## Information about the school

This school is much larger in size than most other secondary schools. The large majority of students are of White British heritage and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is much lower than is typically found. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement, is below average. Their needs relate mainly to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school has specialist status in technology and it has achieved the Healthy School award.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

Severn Vale School is a good school and is rapidly improving. Students are right to be proud of Severn Vale School and relish all it has to offer, as reflected in their ever-rising attendance levels, which are above average. Many wrote in their questionnaires that it is 'the best school'. Well-targeted intervention strategies and exemplary care, guidance and support enable students to meet and exceed their targets, including targets in the technology specialist plan. Pride and respect are hallmarks of students' outstanding personal development. These are reflected in students' great enjoyment of learning, good attendance and punctuality, and their keen involvement in an exceptionally wide range of activities. By the time students leave, they are confident, well-rounded young people, ready to play their full part in the world beyond school.

All groups of students, regardless of gender, ethnicity or ability, make good progress and by the end of Year 11, attainment has risen and is above average. Results in national examinations have improved greatly over the last three years. GCSE results in 2010 were the school's best ever. They were above average, with 84 per cent of all students gaining five or more good grades. Over 60 per cent gained 5 or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics. The school has done particularly well to improve attainment in English, which has improved sharply and is now high.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. While the school has done much to improve teaching, and all students make good progress, there are inconsistencies in teaching and the quality of marking. Most teachers skilfully use questioning in lessons to promote learning and to analyse and improve students' performance. In a minority of lessons, learning is held back because teachers do not always ensure that students are given sufficient time to work independently, to learn in an active way or to talk about their findings. Not all staff have sufficiently fine-tuned the use of assessment information so that the tasks they set in lessons provide maximum challenge for the potentially high-flying students. Teachers mark books carefully and regularly but the advice teachers give to students on how to improve their work is variable and not all students are clear about the next steps in their learning.

The headteacher is committed to making big improvements. His strong leadership skills have enabled him to take staff with him. He has, therefore, clearly communicated his ambitions for the school and is ably supported by a strong team of senior and middle leaders. Together, they demonstrate commitment and there is effective teamwork to select and deliver the right strategic plans that will improve outcomes. Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress in tackling the areas for improvement. Leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, know the strengths and areas for improvement very well. Clear lines of accountability, beginning with the governing body and headteacher through to senior and middle leaders and all staff,

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ensure continuous and rigorous monitoring. A culture of high expectations underpins the school's work. The school has achieved much in a short time by successfully closing the achievement gap for all groups when results are compared to similar groups nationally. This sustained improvement confirms that the school has good capacity to improve further.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Further develop teaching to ensure that a higher proportion is consistently good or better, so that all students can make exceptional progress, by:
  - planning for and extending the learning of the highest attaining students at a consistently challenging pace
  - giving students more responsibility for their own learning by encouraging them to be more active and inquisitive in class
  - ensuring that day-to-day marking is consistently thorough in relation to developing skills across the curriculum and helping students to understand how they can improve their work and presentation skills.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**2**

Students join the school with broadly average attainment. The work seen by inspectors in lessons confirms the overall picture of consistently good progress. Students greatly enjoy school, grow in confidence and develop positive attitudes to learning. They achieve well because most teachers expect much of their students and explain complicated ideas well. In an outstanding science lesson in Year 10, students were learning at a blistering pace because of the teacher's exceptionally high expectations of what he wanted them to learn and the high-powered and challenging tasks he set for them. The school has been successful in speeding up the rates of students' academic progress in recent years, as can be seen in the improved figures for progress over Years 7 to 11 of successive groups of students. Attainment in the specialist subject, design and technology, although improving, lags behind most other subjects and continues to be broadly average. The main factor holding back progress overall is the variability of attainment between subjects in Key Stage 4 which in turn is linked to variations in the quality of teaching.

During the inspection, observation of lessons and analysis of early entry results indicate that students mostly make good or better progress. The school works very effectively to support students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who enter the school with particularly low levels of attainment. Detailed plans to support these groups and timely interventions ensure that they make similar progress to that of their classmates. Relationships throughout the school community are strong and contribute to students aspiring to do well because staff know the students very well. Mutual respect between them is very good, as is the use of humour in and out of the classroom. The school fosters respect for different cultural heritages and there is good cooperation between students. As a result, there are very few racist or bullying incidents among students. They are confident that if unacceptable behaviour occurs, staff will deal with it quickly and confidentially. This awareness of others extends to students having a very strong sense of right and wrong and reinforces all aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students develop a good awareness of healthy lifestyles, feel

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safe and are clear that the school has effective systems in place to protect them from any potential harm. They are assured of this because the curriculum covers a wide range of topics on safety. Additionally, well-developed links with external services confirm that the wellbeing of students is at the forefront of the school's provision. Students make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community and are very proud to act as ambassadors. They develop good workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being through the curriculum, work experience and their above-average attainment in the key skills of English and mathematics.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

## How effective is the provision?

Most teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan thoroughly and meet students' learning needs. In the most effective lessons, relationships are relaxed and resources are carefully selected. There is good pace and teachers use a range of strategies, including whole-class teaching, paired, group or independent work to engage students and build on their skills. Talk is used well to develop thinking and communication skills. For example, there is effective questioning and modelling using the interactive whiteboard to explain and consolidate learning. This is highly effective, particularly when learning is broken down into small blocks and questions are used to probe and assess students' understanding. Students are keen to learn but there are variations in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. For example, where progress is satisfactory

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rather than good, assessment is not used effectively to support individuals or groups. All students work at the same pace, as directed by the teacher, and this leads to insufficient challenge for the more-able students. Teachers sometimes talk too much, which limits the time students are actively and independently learning. As a result, progress is slower and there is less time for students to articulate and build upon what they have learnt by the end of the lesson.

The school has set up thorough systems to check on students' progress and these are used very well to ensure that none is in danger of falling behind. However, variability in the quality of advice teachers give to students means they do not always know specifically what skills they have to master to reach their targets.

Students benefit from a curriculum that is imaginative and flexible. It meets their interests and individual needs well. Different pathways, including the more traditional academic subjects, provide students with a wide range of offers from which to choose. However, students in Key Stage 4 have less than the recommended amount of time for physical education. The school's technology specialism, although having too little impact on the ethos of the school, enhances the curriculum in mathematics, science and in design and technology. It has provided additional resources and teacher time that are helping to improve other subjects across the curriculum. The school works well with a wide range of partners to engage students and extend their learning.

The value placed on each student and the attention paid to meeting each one's individual needs underpin the school's success in supporting and developing students' personal and academic achievements. Students feel that their views are heard, valued and responded to. As one student said, 'Teachers help us. They are always there both for academic and pastoral issues. There is always a friendly face to help you.' School staff treasure students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and the support provided for such students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. Students value and praise the advice they are given in relation to choices of subjects and future careers. A Year 11 student said, 'We are encouraged to aim higher; this helps us to raise our aspirations, for example to go to university.'

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

The calm and purposeful leadership of the highly effective headteacher, ably supported by his senior leadership team, is raising attainment rapidly through what he describes as his 'unrelenting focus on standards' and his commitment to enabling all students to be 'the best they can be'. He has made things happen and delivered clear messages about raising

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aspirations. He has enabled leaders and managers at all levels to take ownership of the actions to make further improvements. Increased accountability and regular line management, linked to performance management, ensure that students' progress is kept under scrutiny and reported regularly to senior leaders, parents and carers. The senior team use their excellent coaching and mentoring skills to offer constructive advice and training and so the quality of teaching and learning is steadily improving.

Subject leaders fulfil their responsibilities well. They are growing into their roles and are actively involved in checking pupils' attainment and progress in their respective areas. The effectiveness of the governing body is good. It is increasingly able to hold the school to account for its work and has been influential in helping senior managers secure school improvement. It fulfils all legal requirements, and all safeguarding arrangements were found to be effective at the time of the inspection. Good practice in safeguarding and child protection is evident in all areas of the school's work.

At the time of the inspection, there was no evidence of any discrimination and the school promotes equality for all pupils vigorously through this sophisticated monitoring and exemplary support. Outcomes for all groups of pupils, given their different starting points, are broadly similar, indicating that the school's commitment to equal opportunities is translated into practice.

The school upholds all aspects of equality very well by working hard to ensure that all groups have equal access to services and opportunities to achieve well. Additionally, the school ensures that barriers to learning, if any, can be dismantled. For example, there has been clear and incisive use of data to identify and improve the achievement of underperforming groups, notably girls and students with particularly low levels of prior attainment. Community cohesion is good. The school develops students' understanding of their religious, ethnic and socioeconomic community well, although more so in the local and global context than nationally. Leaders have ensured that students are developing into caring citizens who respect and value the views of others and that a set of common, shared values is embedded in every student. Given the outcomes for students, the school deploys its staff and resources well to achieve good value for money.



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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## **Views of parents and carers**

Most parents and carers who responded to the parental questionnaire are very positive about almost all aspects of the school's work. They are particularly pleased about their children's safety and experience as well as the good or better progress they make. The very few concerns around communication, unacceptable behaviour, meeting students' needs and encouraging healthy lifestyles were explored during the inspection. The inspection evidence confirmed that the school has developed and implemented plans to deal with each issue raised.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Severn Vale School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 272 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1170 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	61	22	185	68	23	8	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	79	29	183	67	6	2	3	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	79	29	164	60	28	10	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	76	28	171	63	19	7	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	69	25	186	68	15	6	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	50	18	185	68	28	10	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	35	13	191	70	32	12	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	64	24	167	61	17	6	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	69	25	182	67	14	5	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	69	25	161	59	32	12	3	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	42	15	167	61	13	11	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	83	31	166	61	13	5	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	95	35	159	58	13	5	2	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



21 January 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of Severn Vale School, Gloucester GL2 4PR**

Thank you for your welcome when we visited your school recently. We appreciate the conversations we had with many of you. I would like to tell you about our findings.

Yours is a good school and is getting better year on year. You and your parents and carers feel positive about all that the school offers you. Your personal development is excellent. You develop into respectful, considerate, confident young people, well prepared to take your place in the world. You speak with pride about the school and of how greatly you enjoy it.

You make good progress in most of your lessons and attain examination results that are above average compared to those in most other schools. This is because most of the teaching is good and your headteacher and his senior teachers give you challenging targets for all subjects. They monitor your progress towards your targets regularly and support you very well if you fall behind. They have introduced more courses for you to choose from in Years 10 and 11. Your school takes excellent care of you. You told us you feel safe and that there is little bullying. We found that your behaviour is good, and sometimes excellent. You get on very well together.

We have asked your headteacher to help you to attain even higher examination results, by:

- planning work for you that is not too easy or too hard, but just right for you and really makes you think
- giving you more opportunities to learn for yourself in lessons
- ensuring teachers give you clearer advice as to how you can reach your targets.

You can help by always being ready to ask your teachers how you can improve your work. I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Merchant

Lead inspector

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