

Avon Valley College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126459
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	360090
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Karl Sampson

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	665
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	75
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Helen Jenkins
Headteacher	Mr Mark Avoth
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2008
School address	Recreation Road Salisbury SP4 8HH
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 23 teachers and 24 lessons, and saw parts of 15 other lessons and activities. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, members of the governing body and groups of students. Inspectors looked at the college's self-evaluation and planning documents, external evaluations of the college's work, policy documents and students' work. They also scrutinised 128 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers as well as questionnaires completed by staff and a sample of students from each year group.

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

- How well all students are achieving, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The extent to which teaching provides both support and challenge for all groups of students.
- The contribution to school improvement made by partnerships and the school's specialist areas of sports and applied learning.
- The accuracy and demonstrable impact of self-evaluation by leaders and managers at all levels in driving up outcomes for all groups of learners.
- The quality of provision and leadership and management, and their impact on student outcomes, in the sixth form.

Information about the school

Avon Valley College is smaller than most comprehensive schools. The sixth form works in partnership with another local school and a college of further education within the Wessex Partnership. Most students are of White British heritage and the vast majority speak English as their first language. Approximately 40% of students are from service families. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average; their needs include specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) and social, emotional and behavioural issues. The proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs is also above that found nationally. The college has been a specialist sports college since 2005 and, having gained High Performing Specialist School Status in 2009, has taken on a second specialism for applied learning. The college became a trust school in 2010. Among a number of awards the college has achieved are the International Schools award and Healthy School status. A new principal was appointed in September 2010.

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

Avon Valley College is good and improving. The college has an inclusive ethos and is a welcoming and positive learning community. It provides a good level of care, advice and guidance for groups of students and for individuals by working closely with a range of outside agencies and adopting a flexible and responsive structure to provide for the wide range of students' needs. As a result, students feel safe, enjoy their learning and achieve well. The college's sport and applied learning specialist status has been utilised effectively to drive forward the work in raising aspirations and securing achievement. Curriculum provision has been expanded and refined and, as a result, the needs of all students are being met more effectively. Consequently, there is a rising trend in attainment and overall, students make good progress, regardless of their background, starting points or special educational needs. The college has continued to build upon the strengths identified in the previous inspection and its capacity to sustain this improvement is good because:

- it is led well by a principal who has a commitment and passion to raise the aspirations of all students and achieve the highest quality outcomes for them
- leaders have a detailed, accurate and realistic understanding of the college's strengths and areas for development, expectations have been raised and staff are being held firmly to account
- self-evaluation is used with increasing sophistication to devise successful programmes of intervention which address any potential underachievement
- there is a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration among staff and a commitment to improving achievement for all.

Under the leadership of the new principal, college leaders have been empowered to drive improvement and demonstrate that they have the determination and passion required of leaders and managers in a successful school. Achievement is improving because of the sharper and more rigorous monitoring by college leaders, with a clear focus on tracking progress and raising attainment. However, the increased rigour and monitoring and evaluation seen in the main school have not yet fully extended into the sixth form which is satisfactory overall.

Teaching is good overall and at its best enthuses and engages the students through activities that challenge learners of all abilities, including the most able. The best lessons provide opportunities for students to steer learning by developing ideas of their own or by learning independently of the teacher. Teachers use effective questioning to gauge students' understanding and, where necessary, re-shape explanations and offer high-quality verbal and written guidance about steps for improvement. However, these skills are not yet shared by all teachers. Where teaching is less effective, progress is slowed, which results in variation in achievement within and across subjects. This is most

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pronounced in the sixth form. The principal and his team know that there is more work to be done to ensure the best practice in teaching and learning is seen more widely across the whole school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching to at least 85% by the end of the academic year 2012/2013 by:
 - ensuring that systems for monitoring and supporting teaching and learning result in the very best practice being seen more consistently across the curriculum
 - ensuring that teachers consistently use assessment information to plan learning that provides high levels of challenge for all students, particularly the most able.
 - extending the use of effective questioning and dialogue to stimulate students' active participation in all lessons, with more opportunities for students to contribute their ideas to drive the learning forward
 - ensuring consistency in the use of day-to-day assessment so that all students know exactly what they need to do to improve their work through high-quality, subject-specific verbal and written feedback.
- Ensure the sixth form provides the same good quality of education as seen in the main college by:
 - reducing the variability in achievement between subjects
 - strengthening procedures to track student progress and monitor the quality of provision, particularly teaching and learning in all subjects
 - ensuring students are given more opportunity to work independently, creatively and collaboratively and take greater responsibility for their learning and progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

- In the majority of lessons observed, students made good progress and achieved well. Students are attentive and engage enthusiastically with a wide range of activities. They particularly enjoy active practical learning and respond well when given the opportunity to drive the learning forward themselves.
- GCSE examination results have improved over the last three years and attainment is now broadly average. The standards seen in lessons and students' books, results from early examination entry and the school's latest analysis of current performance indicate that the college is on track to continue the strong upward trend in attainment.
- The college has been effective in the action it has taken to raise achievement in English and mathematics. As a result of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, changes to the leadership and management structure, and a more focused approach to intervention strategies and teaching groups, the gap in achievement is reducing.

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- All groups of students, including children from service families and those known to be eligible for free school meals, make at least good progress.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers because of the high-quality individual and personalised support programmes which are put in place.
- Behaviour overall is good, especially in the lessons that engage and motivate students. They are polite and courteous to each other and staff, and say that they enjoy their time at the school. This is illustrated by the improvement in attendance figures, which are now average and rising.
- While a minority of students who returned the questionnaires said that there are occasions when their learning in lessons can be disrupted by others, inspectors saw consistently good behaviour in lessons and around the school. In their interviews with inspectors, all students commented enthusiastically on recent improvements in behaviour.
- The sport and applied learning specialism makes a good contribution to students' achievement, career development and enjoyment of school life. It engages students in learning and helps them to gain the skills they need to take the next steps in their lives with confidence.
- Students demonstrate good engagement with the local community, for example through the performing arts and leadership of sports festivals for local primary schools.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ 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?

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum and its emphasis on developing functional skills as well as personal, learning and thinking skills is having a positive impact on students who have recently entered the school as well as enhancing their choices for the future.
- At Key Stage 4, specialist status and the college's partnership work with other local providers have improved the richness of sporting, vocational and applied opportunities available. This has enabled a much greater degree of personalisation for students when selecting courses and, as a result, their aspirations, achievement and enjoyment are improving.
- The college's impressive on-site vocational provision has become an important learning hub for other local providers. It is particularly effective in promoting students' future economic well-being through a range of practical qualification routes. Students were unanimous in their praise for this provision.
- There is a wide range of well-attended extra-curricular and enrichment activities on offer which give good support to aspects of students' personal development.
- The college's pastoral support base and a range of personalised learning programmes give good support to all students, especially the most vulnerable. They are valuable aspects of provision which ensure that provision for students with a range of learning needs is flexible and effective.

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- The college is particularly successful in the way that it integrates and supports children of service personnel who may join and leave the college at different times during the year. The college's focused and individualised learning and support programmes enable these students to make good progress overall.
- The majority of lessons observed were good or better. They are underpinned by positive relationships which establish a great platform for learning. Learning support assistants are attached to curriculum areas and their expertise is used well to support the differing needs of students.

Less effective lessons, where progress is no better than satisfactory, typically have the following characteristics:

- a tendency for teachers to talk for too long, with the result that students are not given enough time to think for themselves or explain their ideas
- slow-paced learning activities that are insufficiently challenging, limit opportunities to learn independently and can lead to off-task behaviour
- questioning and dialogue that rarely delves deep in order to check and challenge fully students' understanding or develop learning further.

Marking and assessment practices vary in quality. They are at their best in physical education (PE), English and science where teachers provide precise subject-specific guidance. This identifies precisely what students need to do to improve their work and gives them the opportunity to respond to the comments made. However, in too many cases, guidance is of limited value and simply confirms that students have completed work, corrects what they have written, or provides general comments.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

- The new principal inspires a strong belief in the college's success, which is shared by all members of the school community. The fulfillment of every student's potential is central to the college's ethos. There is a determined commitment to drive up standards and ensure that the best practice is shared and consistently applied across the entire curriculum.
- Senior leaders are providing good support to middle leaders in order to sharpen improvement planning in the light of information gained from regular monitoring and evaluation. Assessment information is used stringently to set challenging targets and

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track students' progress with the result that expectations of students' capabilities have been raised.

- The governing body provides good support. The governors understand the school's strengths and areas for development and provide a satisfactory level of challenge. Their confidence and expertise in evaluating the performance of the school and the different groups of students, in relation to national expectations and challenging targets, are growing.
- Effective procedures are in place to ensure students' safety, and all current safeguarding requirements are met.
- The school's commitment to equality of opportunity is exemplified by its work to successfully raise attainment and achievement overall. As a result, the college has been effective at raising the achievement of low- and middle-ability students. College leaders recognise that these improvements now need to be matched by increased proportions of A* and A grades at GCSE for the most- able students.
- The college's contribution to community cohesion is good. Its strengths are in well-established international links and its engagement with the local community, particularly through the use of student sports leaders to promote community sport and a thriving adult education programme.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Improvements in achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 have not yet been fully matched in the sixth form. Poor achievement in 2008 and 2009 necessitated a complete overhaul of sixth form provision and its leadership and management.

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The dramatic improvements in 2010 results are testament to the quality of the college's tightly focused action plan. However, the college has rightly identified the need to increase the proportion of higher examination grades as a priority for improvement again this year. Although they are improving, outcomes for students in the sixth form are no more than satisfactory.

The college has maintained a good range of subject choices, given the relatively small number of students in the sixth form. The range of courses has been extended to include more vocational courses at intermediate and advanced level. Care, guidance and support are good and students value the good range of support from their teachers and individual learning mentors.

Significant changes to leadership and management have ensured that the college has a very good understanding of the areas requiring improvement. It is already reviewing and refining the current action plan to secure continued rates of improvement. As a result, the sixth form is well placed to maintain its upward trajectory.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Of the 19% of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire, the very large majority are happy with their child's experience at the college, the quality of teaching and how well the college is led and managed. Most parents and carers recognise that the college keeps their children safe, meets the particular needs of individual children and enables them to enjoy school. A small minority of parents and carers raised concerns about behaviour in some lessons as well as the effectiveness with which the college enables them to support their child's learning. The inspection team judged that behaviour was good in and around the college during this inspection. They also judged that the college works extremely hard to communicate information about students' progress and provides regular opportunities for parents and carers to discuss teaching and learning. Because the college is consistently striving for improvement, it has taken on board these suggestions and recognises that it needs to persist in finding the most effective ways to communicate with all parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Avon Valley College 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 128 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 665 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	23	18	94	73	6	5	5	4
The school keeps my child safe	30	23	84	66	8	6	2	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	25	20	83	65	14	11	4	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	28	22	77	60	10	8	5	4
The teaching is good at this school	20	16	89	70	9	7	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	15	12	86	67	23	18	4	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	8	86	67	25	20	3	2
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)	17	13	83	65	13	19	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	17	13	91	71	8	6	6	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	20	71	55	18	14	9	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	12	74	58	21	16	8	6
The school is led and managed effectively	22	17	91	71	6	5	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	20	83	65	9	7	6	5

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).

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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



14 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Avon Valley College, Durrington SP4 8HH

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. I am writing to tell you about our findings. We judged the college to be good. It has worked really hard since the last inspection to improve your achievement. Your new principal leads the college well, and is ably supported by other staff and the governing body. They are all determined that you should have the opportunity to succeed and their work enables you to achieve good outcomes. You told us how much you appreciated the work of your teachers.

You enjoy coming to school, are well cared for, have a good range of curricular opportunities and are well taught. You particularly appreciate the positive benefits that sports and applied learning status have brought in terms of supporting you to live a healthy lifestyle and helping you to prepare successfully for life beyond school. You told us you feel safe, and we think your behaviour in and around the school is good. You are polite, friendly and make a good contribution to the life of the school and the wider community.

The college's leaders are working to monitor and improve the consistency of lesson quality. They are aware that sometimes lessons do not always challenge you and we have asked your teachers to work closely on this so that you progress as quickly as you can. We have asked the college to concentrate on two things in particular:

- Improve teaching so that more of it is consistently good and outstanding by:
- ensuring lessons best meet your needs and provide you with challenging learning activities which engage you more actively in learning
- allowing you enough time to develop and explain your ideas and take greater responsibility for your own learning
- ensuring that teachers consistently give you high-quality feedback on your work so that you always know how to improve in each subject.
- Raise achievement and the quality of provision in the sixth form so that these are in line with the rest of the college.

All of you can help by discussing with teachers what you need to do to learn even more. We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Karl Sampson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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