

Somervale School Specialist Media Arts College

Redfield Road, Midsomer Norton, Radstock, BA3 2JD

Inspection dates

17–18 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	N/A
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. He has established high standards and is uncompromising in his drive to improve all aspects of the school's work. He is very well supported by his senior team and by the governing body.
- Teaching is typically good and some is outstanding. It has improved since the previous inspection because school leaders have taken effective action to tackle any inadequate teaching.
- Students achieve well. Attainment has been above average since the previous inspection because staff are accountable for students' progress.
- Students behave very well in lessons and around the school. They are polite, respectful and feel safe. The number of exclusions has fallen significantly and attendance has improved and is above national.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress as a result of good or better teaching. The federation with another local school has enabled the range of subjects to be increased.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although teaching is good overall, some still requires improvement, most notably in mathematics.
- Some inconsistencies in marking mean that students are not always given opportunity to improve their work or act on advice given.
- Some lessons do not provide enough opportunities for students to work on their own or to work things out for themselves.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons, eight of which were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors talked with students and observed their behaviour during lessons, at social times and at lesson change over.
- Meetings were held with staff, including middle and senior leaders, and the School Improvement Partner.
- Inspectors took account of the 28 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and of the 19 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised examination results for 2012 and previous years, students' work and assessment data for students currently at the school.
- Inspectors looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, safeguarding documents, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and records of the impact of professional development on the school's performance.
- No lesson observations were possible on the second day of the inspection as the school was closed to students due to severe weather. A small number of meetings with staff and one member of the governing body took place on the second day.

Inspection team

Caroline Dearden, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Ian Bryant	Additional inspector
Faysal Mikdadi	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Somervale is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Nearly all students are of White British heritage.
- The school holds specialist status in media arts.
- The proportion of students eligible for support through the extra government funding known as the pupil premium is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs who are supported at school action is high. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school converted to become an academy school in June 2010. When its predecessor school, Somervale School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be a satisfactory school.
- The school has been federated with the neighbouring secondary school, Norton Hill Academy, to form the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership, since 2010. The headteacher, who was appointed for September 2012, and the governing body are common to both schools. Students in the sixth form have lessons in both schools. The inspections of the two schools took place at the same time and were coordinated.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the clear majority of teaching is outstanding by:
 - sharing the excellent practice seen in English to ensure that all lessons, especially in mathematics, include active tasks that engage and motivate all students
 - fully promoting students' independent learning by planning more opportunities for them to work on their own, and by providing them with opportunities to share their ideas with others and to engage in dialogue with each other
 - consistently providing clear written feedback to students about their work so that they are able to respond to advice given, take responsibility for their own progress and to reach or exceed targets.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good.

- Students join the school with generally average levels of attainment overall. However, the proportion entering the school with the highest Key Stage 2 levels is below that found nationally.
- In recent years, the proportion of students achieving five or more higher-grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, has been higher than the national average and was broadly average in 2012.
- Students known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding make good progress, as measured against their average point scores compared with others in the school, because their needs are well known and, as a result, resources to support their learning are used effectively.
- The curriculum has been developed to provide students with clear pathways into higher education, work or training. As a result, all students leave Year 11 with a range of qualifications. The percentage gaining five or more A*-G GCSE grades has been above the national figure for the past five years. The proportion leaving school at the end of Key Stage 4 and not continuing in education, employment or training has been very low over recent years, with none in 2012.
- A few students take their mathematics GCSE early. The school uses this option to motivate students because GCSE grade C passes are used to promote a sense of achievement and raise aspirations.
- Teachers and other adults support students who are disabled or who have special educational needs well so that they make good progress and achieve well. Additional sessions to promote literacy and reading skills are having a positive impact on students' achievement. Very good use is made of paired reading in which younger students receive additional support from Year 11 students.
- Recent developments in tracking of students' progress and achievement have been effectively embedded into the work of middle leaders. The school acts quickly to address areas of underachievement. For example, a lesson cover supervisor who is a qualified teacher provides one-to-one mentoring for students in Year 11.
- Students are keen to make progress and are proud of their achievements, particularly in the school's specialist field of media arts. In the best lessons, they develop independence and take responsibility for their own learning. For example, in an English lesson that was taught outstandingly well, students carried out both interactive and research tasks to help them understand the relationship between Romeo and Juliet. This resulted in a detailed piece of high-quality writing in which students clearly demonstrated their ability to apply what they had learnt.
- Students achieve well in the sixth form. In all subjects, achievement is at least in line with the national average and is better in some. All groups of students achieve well. During the inspection, good or better teaching led to at least good progress in the lessons observed.

The quality of teaching is good

- The majority of teaching is typically at least good and some that is outstanding; only a very small amount requires improvement. Leaders and managers have challenged and eradicated inadequate teaching.
- Where teaching is good or better, teachers plan activities that engage students and encourage them to think for themselves. In the best lessons, students work on their own and are able to justify their opinions and answers. These strengths were equally well demonstrated in a Spanish lesson and in a technology lesson where students worked purposefully in small groups, understood what the purpose of the exercise was, applied skills developed in previous sessions and were confident that feedback from the teacher and from other students would be thoughtful and productive.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. Most use questioning effectively to engage all students and encourage them to give extended answers. However, where teaching requires improvement,

as indicated for example in a minority of mathematics lessons, teachers either accept simple responses or are too quick to answer questions for students. This slows progress and makes students rely too heavily on the teacher.

- Assessment and the use of student progress information has been consolidated since the school became an academy. Teachers have confidence in the systems for identifying underachievement and are able to quickly provide support where necessary. In the best lessons, opportunities for students to self- and peer-assess are well established and they are able to analyse how to push themselves further.
- There is variation in the quality and regularity of marking across the school. There is some outstanding practice, for example in English, where teachers explain how students can improve their work and then give them time to act on the advice given. However, some marking simply confirms what the students are able to do and fails to provide targets for improvement, particularly in mathematics.
- Lessons, particularly in media arts, and extra-curricular activities promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, in a religious studies lesson, students actively engaged group discussions, gave consideration to the views of others and developed a good understanding of Christian suffering.
- Teaching in the sixth form is usually at least good. A variety of teaching approaches are used and students develop good independence. As a result, the majority of students make good progress and enjoy their lessons. However, some teaching needs to take better account of the differing needs of the students in the group. Students are provided with good information and guidance about their next steps.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Inspectors were very impressed with the behaviour of all students at all times during the inspection. They are courteous and polite to each other and to adults.
- Behaviour in lessons is at least good, with much that is outstanding. Where teaching requires improvement, students are not actively engaged in their learning and become distracted.
- Students, staff, and parents and carers agree that behaviour has improved considerably over recent years and has been typically good since the start of the academy. For example, one member of staff commented: 'In the time I have been at the school, the attitudes and behaviour of students have been transformed.' Very few parents and carers expressed concern about behaviour in the Parent View responses.
- Students feel very safe in school. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View believe that the school keeps their children safe. Incidents of bullying are rare and, when they do occur, are dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. Students have good understanding of the different types of bullying, of the risks associated with hazardous behaviour and with using the internet.
- The school's behaviour records show that incidents of poor behaviour have reduced over the last three years. Exclusions have fallen recently and are now below the national average.
- High-quality care is provided by the pastoral system. Attendance is tracked and monitored and, as a result, has improved since the last inspection. It is now above average. However, a very small minority of students continue to have high, persistent absence.
- The wide range of extra-curricular activities helps students to interact with each other across the age range.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has a passion for achieving excellence. He has the respect of his senior team and of the staff, and is described as 'having a hard edge to his leadership'. As a result, there is a shared belief that he has the strength and determination to further improve the school and the

federation.

- Efforts to improve the quality of middle leadership have been successful and there is a shared drive to raise achievement, promote high aspirations and therefore improve students' life choices. One member of staff commented: 'I have had the privilege of working here for 10 years. It is the passion and commitment of all staff that continues to drive the school forward.'
- Leaders rigorously check on the quality of teaching. Where weaknesses are identified, teachers are provided with excellent support to develop specific skills. This includes working with colleagues from the other secondary school in the federation.
- The headteacher and school leaders have been highly effective in tackling poor performance. They benefit from good support from the School Improvement Partner. Together with governors, they rigorously apply performance management procedures, use information about students' progress and the quality of teaching to evaluate performance and make decisions about pay progression. Teachers know that they are accountable for students' progress.
- The school's self-evaluation is robust and accurate. Leaders and managers know the school well, where its strengths lie and where there are areas for improvement. This is reflected in good-quality development plans for subjects, pastoral teams and for the school.
- Pastoral staff respond quickly to parents' and carers' concerns and provide individual support for students facing challenging circumstances. Leaders ensure that equality of opportunity is well promoted and that discrimination in any form is not tolerated.
- The curriculum is well matched to the needs of students. It has been developed to include greater access to vocational subjects and to ensure that Key Stage 3 provides sufficient opportunities for students to progress and strengthen their skills so that they are well placed to start their GCSEs.
- The school uses the additional pupil premium funding very well. Students known to be eligible receive the support they need and are fully included in the life of the school. The attainment of those students known to be eligible, as indicated by their average points score in GCSE examinations, is improving and is above that of their peers. The achievement of these students is improving to be in line with national averages for all students.
- The sixth form has developed since the school federated with another secondary school. Students are provided with a rich curriculum, matched very well to their needs and aspirations; this is reviewed regularly. Strong partnerships with other post-16 providers ensure that a wide variety of vocational and academic subjects is available. The leadership of the sixth form is good.
- Procedures for safeguarding meet all current requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is aware of the improvements the headteacher has recently secured. It has faith and trust in his ability to secure sustained improvements. Governors make good use of individual skills to conscientiously and effectively challenge and support the headteacher and leadership teams. They are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the school, including the quality of teaching and the behaviour of students. Through regular training, visits to the school and the use of data, they assess how well the school is doing, including comparison to other schools nationally. Governors talk knowledgeably about procedures and targets for performance management of staff and are therefore able to accurately evaluate leaders' decisions about pay progression. Governors have the expert skills necessary to oversee the school's finances and to evaluate how the use of resources benefits students. For example, they make sure that pupil premium funding supports eligible students and secures good progress. Governors are diligent in ensuring that all safeguarding and child protection policies and practice meet requirements and that staff and students work within a safe environment.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136311
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	406645

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Maintained
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	500
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	44
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stuart Warrener
Headteacher	Alun Williams
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 November 2010
Telephone number	01761 414276
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