



Office for Standards
in Education

Somervale School

*This inspection does not include the sixth form.
Please refer to the March 2003 for information about the sixth form.
This is available via the middle column of the school's page on the Ofsted web site.*

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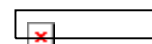
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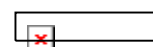
Basic information about the school



| | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Name of school: | Somervale School |
| Type of school: | Secondary Comprehensive |
| Status: | Community |
| Age range of pupils: | 11 to 18 years |
| Headteacher: | Mr M Gorman |

| | |
|--|---|
| Address of school: | Redfield Road Midsomer Norton Radstock BA3 2HG |
| Telephone: | 01761 414 276 |
| Name and address of appropriate authority: | The governing body, address as above |
| Chair of governors: | Mr M Venning |
| Local education authority area: | Bath and North East Somerset |
| Unique reference number: | 109307 |
| Name of reporting inspector: | Ms B J Cusdin HMI |
| Dates of inspection: | 3-4 December 2003 |

Introduction



1. Somervale School is an average-sized comprehensive school, with 904 pupils on roll of whom 107 are in the sixth form. Somervale School operates joint-sixth form provision with Norton Hill School and Norton Radstock College. It has been a Media Arts College since September 2000. Almost all of the pupils are white British: 1.9 per cent of the pupils have a mother tongue other than English. Attainment on entry to Year 7 is average. The proportion of the pupils with special educational needs, 12 per cent, is broadly in line with the national figure. There is an above-average proportion, three per cent, who have a Statement of Special Educational Need. Very few pupils transfer in or out of the school other than at the usual times. The percentage of the pupils eligible for free school meals, seven per cent, is below average.

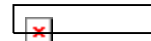
2. The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in March 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school. Widespread serious weaknesses were identified in the provision at Key Stages 3 and 4. The sixth-form provision was judged to be satisfactory with some very good features.

3. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) in December 2003 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of March 2003. Two HMI and one Additional Inspector spent two days in the school. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

4. Thirty six lessons or parts of lessons and five registration sessions in Years 7 to 10 were inspected. No Year 11 lessons were observed as the pupils were engaged in internal examinations. The pupils were observed at break and lunch time and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, nominated staff, the chair of governors and a representative from the local education authority (LEA). Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. The sixth-form provision was not inspected as the serious weaknesses had been located solely in the main part of the school.

5. The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of March 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

Main findings



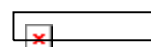
6. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school requires special measures, since it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. The main findings of the inspection are:

- the section 10 inspection in March 2003 judged all the following to be unsatisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4: the quality of teaching and learning; the management of the pupils' behaviour; and the provision in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Moreover there was significant underachievement at Key Stage 3;
- the headteacher drew up a sound action plan to address the key issues and these serious weaknesses. The LEA provided a good range of external support, appropriately focused on the weakest areas. However, the widespread serious weaknesses remain despite improvements in policy, training and monitoring, and the greater clarity in the senior managers' expectations of staff;
- overall, the climate for learning is unsatisfactory. The pupils showed positive attitudes in a few lessons and were motivated to persevere with their tasks. In over a third of the lessons, however, the pupils' behaviour and their attitudes were unsatisfactory. Often in these lessons, the pupils chattered through the teachers' explanations. They were slow to engage in their independent assignments and showed little interest in the work;
- the management of behaviour was unsatisfactory in these lessons. The teachers accepted the pupils' negative attitudes too readily. Furthermore, in some instances, the teachers did not follow through earlier warnings when the misbehaviour resumed. The staff rarely acknowledged those pupils who were behaving well and trying to get on with their work quietly;
- the quality of teaching and learning was unsatisfactory in almost a half of the lessons overall, and in well over a half of the 22 lessons seen in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and ICT;
- too often, the expectations of the gains in knowledge, skills and understanding that could be achieved in a lesson were set too low. Some of the unsatisfactory teaching occurred in lessons that had been planned appropriately but this agenda was compromised by the teachers' inability to combat the pupils' negative attitudes and engage them appropriately in learning;
- in the well-taught lessons the pupils responded positively to challenges. They discussed their ideas constructively and communicated their conclusions confidently;
- the headteacher has led the school well during a very difficult period. He took over the leadership of the school the term before the inspection in March 2003. The extent of the school's underperformance and the weaknesses in teaching and learning were only acknowledged when the LEA's link adviser, also relatively recently in post, and the headteacher took up their appointments;
- the financial difficulties and staffing issues have been tackled robustly by the headteacher, with the firm backing of the governors. The headteacher has the active support of the senior team, whose members have played their part in improving policy and supporting the training outlined in the action plan;
- the school's use of data has been unskilled and subject leadership expertise underdeveloped. Appropriate steps are being taken to use data more productively and to improve the effectiveness of subject leadership. However, the school has not secured the much-needed improvements in teaching and learning;
- the pupils' attainment in the 2003 Key Stage 3 national tests remained below national averages. There was a small increase in the proportions achieving the expected Level 5 and above in mathematics and science. The very low targets set for these tests were only met in mathematics. The school's performance was well

below that achieved by schools where the pupils had similar standards on entry in Year 7, and also well below that of schools with similar rates of entitlement to free school meals;

- the school's GCSE results at the end of Key Stage 4 were also below national averages. The proportion achieving five or more A* to C grades, 38 per cent, was similar to the previous year. This fell far short of the governors' target of 60 per cent, which was based on the pupils' standards on entry in Year 7. The school's results overall were in line with the performance of schools that had similar low attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 but were very low when compared with other schools that have similar rates of entitlement to free school meals. Gains over Key Stage 4 were reasonable but the school failed to claw back the ground lost at Key Stage 3.

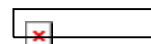
Key issues



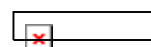
7. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers, staff and LEA need to:

- raise standards of achievement in English, mathematics, science and ICT;
- improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- improve standards of behaviour and the pupils' attitudes to learning;
- continue to improve the leadership and management.

Inspection findings



Standards of achievement



8. The pupils' attainment in the 2003 Key Stage 3 national tests remained below national averages. There was a small increase in the proportions achieving the expected Level 5 and above in mathematics and science. The very low targets set for these tests were only met in mathematics. The school's performance was well below that achieved by schools where the pupils had similar standards on entry in Year 7, and also well below that of schools with similar rates of entitlement to free school meals.

9. The school's GCSE results at the end of Key Stage 4 were also below national averages. The proportion achieving five or more A* to C grades, 38 per cent, was similar to the previous year. This fell far short of the governors' target of 60 per cent, which was based on the pupils' standards on entry in Year 7. The school's results overall were in line with the performance of schools that had similar low attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 but were very low when compared with other schools that have similar rates of entitlement to free school meals. Gains over Key Stage 4 were reasonable but the school failed to claw back the ground lost at Key Stage 3.

10. Standards in English are below those expected for pupils of the same age and do not reflect the

prior attainment of the pupils. There are examples of good work in English from pupils in Year 7, 9 and 11. By the end of Key Stage 4, for example, some pupils' response to literature is sophisticated and analytical. These pupils write at length, using arguments which are well supported by reference to text. There are, however, too many examples of poorly constructed pieces of writing, and the use of an inappropriately informal style. Standards of handwriting have deteriorated in Year 7 since the beginning of the year.

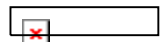
11. The pupils' speaking and listening skills are underdeveloped. In a productive geography lesson, however, the pupils learnt to use specialist vocabulary well, helped by focused teaching and the glossaries displayed around the walls which were reminders of the meaning of these words. Formal language, however, is not demanded regularly enough where it would be appropriate. There were few opportunities for the pupils to tackle questions that promoted debate and stimulated thinking. Not enough time was set aside for pupils to rehearse their ideas in pair and group work.

12. The pupils' progress in mathematics is too variable. Nonetheless, they have been taught appropriate techniques for handling number and recognising properties of shape. Although some pupils showed a reasonably secure recall of recent topics, others still had gaps in the learning that they should have achieved earlier in the year. In some mathematics lessons, the pupils spent too long on work which was undemanding. Extension work was planned but it was not reached as all pupils, whatever their capability, undertook the same initial lengthy exercises in these lessons. Overall the pupils were not briefed clearly enough on ways that they could improve their progress in mathematics. In a few instances, inaccuracies went unnoticed.

13. There is widespread underachievement in science. Standards are restricted by the teachers' over-direction in lessons, with too little time given to discussion, evaluation and the development of the pupils' scientific understanding and investigative skills. Too many lessons were marred by the pupils' poor attitudes, which slowed down proceedings.

14. There is also significant underachievement in ICT. Inadequate time is allocated to the teaching of this subject. Accommodation is cramped. The pupils' achievement has not been monitored systematically over time. The arrangements for grouping pupils for the timetabled ICT lessons have changed, which has made it difficult to ensure continuity in their learning. The pupils' attitudes were poor in both the ICT lessons observed and their progress was unsatisfactory.

Quality of education



15. The quality of teaching and learning was unsatisfactory in almost a half of the lessons overall, and in well over a half of the 22 lessons seen in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and ICT.

16. Too often, the teachers' expectations of the gains in knowledge, skills and understanding that could be achieved in a lesson were set too low. In some of the unsatisfactory lessons, the teachers relied too exclusively on low-level tasks, which did little to promote the pupils' understanding of the topic or develop their skills in the subject. There were lesson plans where the learning objectives were too numerous or too general; for example the teacher gave the criterion for success in one lesson as 'good answers'. There were also lessons where no attempt was made to establish how far the learning objectives had been achieved.

17. Some of the unsatisfactory teaching occurred in lessons that had been planned appropriately but this agenda was compromised by the teachers' inability to combat the pupils' negative attitudes and focus them appropriately on learning. The teachers accepted the pupils' negative attitudes too readily. Furthermore, in some instances, the teachers did not follow through earlier warnings when the misbehaviour resumed. The staff rarely acknowledged those pupils who were behaving well and trying to get on with their work quietly.

18. The quality of the teaching of literacy to groups withdrawn from classrooms for particular work was satisfactory. Although the pupils with special education needs and the able pupils were often listed on lesson plans, strategies to extend and support their learning were not.

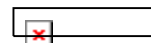
19. The school is mounting an out-of-hours enrichment curriculum which includes projects catering for the gifted and talented pupils. The planning of extension strategies within the schemes of work is variable: it was rare to see any lessons in which teachers deliberately sought to provide challenging work for the able pupils.

20. Every pupil is taught to use the library for research and pleasure and this is a popular venue at lunchtime, especially for boys. Some subject departments have useful policies for improving particular literacy skills: they are effectively teaching and displaying key vocabulary. A good display of work in history also illustrated success in teaching pupils how to construct an argument.

21. All teachers, however, are not accepting their responsibility to promote literacy. Errors in spellings and simple punctuation are too evident in pupils' books and often go unmarked. Unfinished written work demonstrates the inappropriateness of the tasks for some pupils and the slow work rate of other pupils. There were examples of productive marking in English, where the pupils were given clear guidance on ways to improve their work and useful feedback on the learning that they had achieved.

22. Expectations about the frequency of homework have been clarified but some pupils have not recorded their homework timetable in their planners and some have days where no homework is recorded. It is difficult to track homework in some exercise books.

Management and efficiency of the school



23. The headteacher has led the school well during a very difficult period. He took over the leadership of the school the term before the inspection in March 2003. The extent of the school's underperformance and the weaknesses in teaching and learning were only acknowledged when the LEA's link adviser, also relatively recently in post, and the headteacher took up their appointments.

24. The section 10 inspection in March 2003 judged all the following to be unsatisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4: the quality of teaching and learning; the management of the pupils' behaviour; and the provision in English, mathematics, science and ICT. Moreover there was significant underachievement at Key Stage 3.

25. The headteacher drew up a sensible action plan to address the key issues and these serious weaknesses. The school has drawn on external support and advice. However, the widespread serious weaknesses remain despite improvements in policy, training and monitoring, and the greater clarity in the senior managers' expectations of staff. The headteacher has the active support of the senior team, whose members have played their part in improving policy and supporting the training outlined in the action plan.

26. The school's expectations and approach to pupils' behaviour have been clearly stated through a six-point response to misbehaviour in lessons, known as "The Somervale Way", and in the form of a code of conduct for pupils, supported by a behaviour management policy. The senior managers steadily reinforce these expectations in their dealings with pupils and through their presence around the school site.

27. Nevertheless, too many of the March 2003 inspection report's criticisms of pupils' unsatisfactory behaviour remain valid. The school's policy and guidance to teachers are not being implemented with sufficient firmness and consistency. The planned actions have not achieved the radical

improvement where it was most needed: in lessons and classrooms.

28. The agenda for staff training has been focused on the prioritisation within the action plan. Good practice in teaching has been shared, and useful guidance on teaching and learning forms part of a "toolkit". Training and support for newly qualified teachers have been established. The school has used external expertise to coach where teaching was weakest: this coaching has met with mixed success to date.

29. The quality of teaching has been monitored by the LEA's advisers, by senior managers and latterly by subject leaders. The school's proforma for monitoring, helpfully picks out the aspects of teaching and learning to assess. Information from the monitoring programme has been compiled and outcomes have been fed into advice in staff bulletins. The monitoring programme, however, has not achieved sufficient reduction in the amount of unsatisfactory teaching, which remains far too high.

30. The new assessment policy sets out sensible approaches to providing pupils with better information about the standards of their work and what they should be able to achieve in the future. The school's policy for self-evaluation is sound but implementation is in its very early stages. The school's use of data has been unskilled, but appropriate steps are being taken to use data more productively. Analyses of examination results have been written to a common format, and some of these have looked to see whether the pupils have made sufficient gains over a key stage. Systems have been set up to monitor the progress made by the pupils.

31. The staff responsible for special educational needs and for able pupils are new appointments and they have achieved much in a short time. They are aware of where improvement is needed. Better monitoring systems have been established and registers for both groups identify the pupils' areas of need.

32. It is early days in the monitoring of teaching and learning by subject leaders. The subject leader for English has observed three lessons and has pinpointed two clear areas where there is the capacity to improve teaching.

33. The subject leader for mathematics has begun to implement some of the well-judged actions in the department's development plan. There is more illustration of levels through units of work and suggestions for teaching activities have been gathered together. Three mathematics teachers have received extra support from one of the LEA's consultants, particularly in lesson-planning: the subject leader, however, has not regularly scrutinised plans to ensure that expectations are sufficiently high.

34. The subject leader for science has been assiduous in reviewing and revising the curriculum and gathering assessment data. The key weaknesses of the teaching, which appear across the whole department in varying degrees, are the main barrier to raising standards, and have not been successfully addressed. The teaching in science is failing to: set clear objectives for developing the pupils' skills; encourage the pupils to think and enquire for themselves; secure appropriate expectations of pupils' behaviour; and achieve an appropriate quality and amount of work.

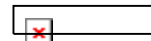
35. The financial difficulties and staffing issues have been tackled robustly by the headteacher, with the firm backing of the governors. The school has reduced the non-teaching time for the teachers from an average of 20 per cent to 14 per cent. Reductions in the staffing establishment have taken place, including one compulsory redundancy.

36. The school submits budgetary monitoring reports to the governors' finance committee. Current figures suggest a budget deficit at the end of this financial year of £160,000. There is a high incidence of absence amongst staff which is adding to the school's financial burden. Both governors and the LEA are keeping a close watch on spending, and they fully recognise the need to achieve cost-effectiveness.

37. The LEA has provided a good range of external support since the section 10 inspection, appropriately focused on the weakest areas. There has been practical advice and support in

financial and personnel matters.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development



38. The school has set out to widen links with other institutions to enhance the cultural provision. The school has achieved Artsmark Gold Status and is currently working on a commission from a television company to stage a community play. The new music centre was recently opened.

39. There is a newly devised programme for citizenship, careers and guidance, as well as personal, social and health education. This has been well received by the staff involved in these areas. There have been successes in sports tournaments.

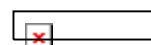
40. The pupils showed positive attitudes in a few lessons and were motivated to persevere with their tasks. In the well-taught lessons the pupils responded positively to challenges. They discussed their ideas constructively and communicated their conclusions confidently. These pupils showed respect for each other.

41. Overall, however, the climate for learning is unsatisfactory. In over a third of the lessons the pupils' behaviour and their attitudes were unsatisfactory. Often in these lessons, the pupils chattered through the teachers' explanations. Some were slow to engage in their independent assignments and showed little interest in the work.

42. These pupils had low aspirations of learning for themselves. They appeared unconcerned that they were disrupting the learning for others and frustrating the teachers' attempts to get them to listen. This lack of maturity was also reported at the section 10 inspection. The school has not made sufficient inroads into improving the pupils' personal development.

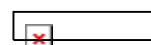
43. Attendance rates in the last school year averaged 92 per cent, which was broadly in line with the national figure. There was insufficient evidence to judge the provision made for the pupils' spiritual development.

The action plan



44. The school's action plan is a comprehensive document which systematically addresses the key issues. It set out the principles for the school's recovery. The planned actions were designed to build appropriately on one another.

Implementation of the action plan



45. **Key Issue 1: urgently improve teaching and learning in order to raise standards so that the pupils achieve as well as they can**

Progress on this key issue has been limited. Good practice has been shared, but there is too much weaker practice remaining which has failed to adopt the productive techniques successfully employed by the most effective teachers. The pupils are clearer about the skills that they need to improve in English but have insufficient guidance elsewhere on how to improve their learning. Too many lessons still fail to motivate the pupils and the match of work to the range of attainment in classes remains weak.

46. Key Issue 2: improve the rates of progress for Key Stage 3 pupils

Progress on this key issue has been limited. On the whole, lesson time was not used well. Sometimes the pupils were busy but they were not productively engaged in learning. Expectations of what can be achieved in lessons remain low. In over a half of the Key Stage 3 lessons the pupils' progress was unsatisfactory. There is more systematic use of data and the targets set by the school for future performance are built more reliably on an analysis of this information.

47. Key Issue 3: improve the monitoring of the progress pupils make, especially those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented

There has been reasonable progress in this key issue. The monitoring of the pupils' progress is improving. It was rare, however, in the lessons to see extension work for the gifted and talented or to see strategies which developed the pupils' independence in learning. The learning support assistants in most, but not all, lessons helped the lower attaining pupils to persevere and complete their tasks. The clarity of learning objectives has improved but was still unsatisfactory in some cases.

48. Key Issue 4: put in place a concerted and well-developed plan to assist teachers to manage their classes better

Progress in this key issue has been limited. The senior team set out a well-reasoned plan to improve the management of behaviour. There are far clearer expectations of conduct and sensible procedures for responding to poor behaviour at a whole-school level. The teachers are more aware of the need for consistency but it is some way from being achieved. The failure to turn around the pupils' poor attitudes remains a major barrier to improving learning and raising standards.

49. Key Issue 5: create an ethos within which evaluation is seen as improving teaching and raising standards

There has been reasonable progress on this key issue. Classroom observations have been undertaken and messages fed back to the staff. There is a wider acceptance by staff of the usefulness of lesson observation and feedback. Nevertheless, there is still work to do to ensure that all staff evaluate the success of their lessons and the appropriateness of their expectations, and that the monitoring programme contributes to improvements in teaching and learning.

50. Key Issue 6: ensure that subject leaders increase their effectiveness and recognise their responsibilities in improving teaching and learning and raising standards

There has been reasonable progress on this key issue. Before March 2003 the skills of subject leadership were very low. A sound management training programme has commenced and demands are being phased over time. Currently, subject leadership remains underdeveloped. Although there are signs that subject leaders in the core subjects have introduced some appropriate initiatives, for example by improving curricular guidance, this tier of management is not yet the "powerhouse" needed to drive up standards and eradicate weaknesses quickly.

51. Key Issue 7: improve procedures for ensuring that equipment and health and safety systems are fully up-to-date and well implemented

This key issue was not inspected in any detail. The LEA has conducted an audit of health and safety at the school. There is a new policy for health and safety and training for its implementation

has begun.

52. Key Issue 8: improve financial planning and management which are unsatisfactory to deal with the deficit

There has been reasonable progress on this key issue. The governors monitor spending regularly and are kept informed of the projected deficit. The staffing costs were reviewed. Redundancies and reduced non-teaching time have trimmed the expenditure on staffing.

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