

Somervale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109307
Local Authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	288348
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	James Sage HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	732
6th form	112
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Venning
Headteacher	Michael Gorman
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Redfield Road Midsomer Norton Radstock BA3 2HG
Telephone number	01761 414276
Fax number	01761 410613

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Somervale is a school of below average size with a small sixth form. It serves the town of Midsomer Norton and surrounding villages. The area is socially and economically mixed, and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly in line with the national figure, although the proportion with a statement of special educational need is a little above average. Most students are White British, and very few speak English as an additional language. Although the attainment of students on entry to the school varies from one year group to another, it is broadly average overall.

The school has been a specialist media arts college since September 2000. Sixth form provision is shared with two other schools and a college of further education.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the school in meeting the needs of students is good. The good improvement across all aspects of the school over the past four years provides clear evidence that the school has good capacity to secure further improvements. The school provides good value for money.

Students achieve well and standards have risen significantly over three years from below to above average. The quality of teaching has improved and the large majority of lessons are good or better. Good attention is given to the professional development of teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The curriculum is good and is reviewed regularly to ensure that it meets the needs of all students well. Thorough academic monitoring means that the very large majority of students in all years are clear about their targets, their current levels of achievement and what they need to do make progress. The rigorous monitoring, evaluation and review of the quality of provision has been a key factor in securing the significant improvements that have taken place.

The school gives good attention to the personal development and well-being of all students and the outcomes are good. The very large majority of students have a very positive attitude to learning and enjoy their education. This shows a very marked improvement from four years ago. The school systematically monitors students' attitudes and uses the data well to plan and target interventions to improve attitudes and academic achievement. The school is fully aware of the low levels of self-esteem of some students, which adversely affects their confidence, and the need to develop more independence in learning. There are good levels of support, both for those with learning difficulties and disabilities and for those that are gifted and talented. Both have a positive impact on the rest of the school. The school provides a wide range of enrichment activities, many involving links with the wider community. The school's specialist media arts status is used well to the benefit of the whole school and the community. It has a widespread impact on the curriculum, and contributes to the improvements the school has made in the personal development of its students.

The new student support structure, organised around three 'colleges', works very well and leads to outstanding care, guidance and support for all students. The involvement of students in many aspects of school life and the high quality of 'student voice' is another outstanding feature of the school and recognised as such externally. The school rightly prides itself on being inclusive. Many students independently express this view. Students have a strong sense of pride in the school and its place in the local community.

The improvements the school has made can be directly attributed to the clear direction and strong leadership provided by the headteacher and the senior leadership team, supported well by the governing body. There are some very strong middle leaders, in particular the three heads of college and in key curriculum areas. As a result, many of the advances have become firmly embedded in practice across the school, and this gives the school the capacity to secure and sustain further improvement. Students' achievements in a very small number of subjects do not show the same level of improvement. The current model of curriculum leadership does not provide the strong leadership required to secure progress in these areas.

The school is forging a distinctive identity that will stand it in good stead in the future. It is a school that is extremely caring and supports its students and staff very well, takes excellent account of the views of the students, achieves good outcomes and serves the community well.

Together with the strengths arising from the specialist media arts, this puts the school in a strong position to go forward.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are good. Standards and achievements have risen steadily over three years and are now good. The retention of students to the end of courses in Years 12 and 13 is also good. The proportion of students going on to higher education has risen and the large majority are successful in securing places. There is now a strong culture of high aspirations. These improvements are a result of good teaching and providing a wide and varied curriculum that meets the needs of all students well. Additionally, relationships between staff and students are very strong, and teachers provide good academic and personal support. Students are clear about their targets, their current levels of achievement and what they need to do to improve. Careful monitoring of students' progress leads to well planned interventions that prevent students falling behind.

The current arrangements mean that sixth form teaching is not routinely included in the departmental monitoring, evaluation and review process. Consequently, whilst the sixth form is managed and led well, there is no systematic monitoring of the quality of the provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of work in a small number of subjects to bring it up to the standard of the large majority by improving the way that these subjects are managed.
- Introduce more systematic monitoring, evaluation and review of the quality of provision in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students achieve well. They attain above average standards and make good progress at both Key Stages 3 and 4, and in the sixth form.

Standards on entry are broadly in line with the national average. Students make very good progress through Key Stage 3 in mathematics and science and achieve above average standards. In English, standards and achievements in 2006 were well below expectations, but the standards of work and students' progress in lessons show marked improvement and achievement is now good. This is supported by the school's own analysis of data.

The current standards of students in Year 11 are above average overall and both mathematics and English have improved. Subjects that had weaker results in 2006 are expected to improve, with the exception of geography which has not made the expected progress. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are also expected to be average with satisfactory progress. Students make good progress in the large majority of subjects in Key Stage 4.

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are set challenging targets and are also doing well overall, with most achieving their targets and a small proportion making very good progress. High attaining students do well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have many opportunities in lessons to explore feelings and others' experiences. Students have a good understanding of the effects of their actions on others; their behaviour is good and they are quick to point out how disruption can affect their learning. The school's approach to religious education and critical thinking helps students develop a good understanding of themselves and relationships with others, as well as helping to develop independence and self-esteem. Despite this, many lack confidence in their ability and the school's analysis indicates that 'confidence in learning' has not improved as much as other aspects of students' self-evaluation. Social development is very good with excellent opportunities for students to participate in activities within the school and wider community. The cultural development of students is satisfactory. There is some development of multicultural awareness, for example links with schools in other countries.

Students' attitudes to the school are systematically and regularly surveyed. This shows clearly that attitudes have improved dramatically and students are extremely positive and are proud of the school. The overwhelming majority of parents are pleased with behaviour and attitudes. Students enjoy school and are keen to do well. This is evident in lessons, where they take part with interest and enthusiasm. Students feel safe in school and movement around the school is orderly. They know who they can talk to when they are troubled and have every confidence in the teachers and support staff.

All students are aware of the need for good exercise and a healthy diet. A high proportion exercise regularly, with good participation in extra-curricular games. Students are vocal about their lunchtime choices and have attempted to improve the options available.

Students make an extremely positive contribution to the running of the school and also have an impact in the wider community. The school is involved in a number of community projects including musical recitals. Students also run a radio station that has been granted a broadcasting licence and serves the local community. The school's web site is very much a product of collaboration between the staff and students and the School Council runs its own section entirely independently and discusses topics such as 'Every Child Matters'.

Students develop effective skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being. Standards in literacy and numeracy are above average. ICT skills are developed across the curriculum and standards are satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning has improved through concerted effort on getting the basics right. The large majority of lessons are at least good with a small, but significant proportion outstanding. Lessons are planned well and students are clear about what they should learn. Many teachers confidently use a wide range of strategies and varied and interesting resources to maintain a lively pace and students' interest. Students enjoy these lessons, and

work enthusiastically. They are fully involved through skilful questioning, and are encouraged to solve problems, talk about their findings and justify their opinions. They are given good feedback and clear indications of what they need to do to improve their work or further develop their understanding and skills. As a result, progress is good. The involvement of students in planning and assessing their own work in most subjects is helping to develop their independence in learning, although many still lack confidence.

In a small minority of lessons, the objectives are not clear and focus on completing an activity rather than what students should be learning in the subject. As a result, in these lessons little account is taken of the needs of individual students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is supplemented well by dance, drama, a second language and a wide range of interesting activities arising from the school's specialist media arts status. There is good coverage of the personal, social, health and citizenship curriculum. Students with low levels of literacy are identified early in Year 7, or before, and given good additional support. The school has developed a clear set of criteria and procedures to identify gifted and talented students, and offers them a good range of extra challenges.

The range of courses on offer at Key Stage 4 is good with clear plans to develop this further through local collaboration. A small group of students unsuited to an academic route follow a vocational course with a good variety of practical and workplace experiences. Others take a mix of vocational and academic subjects and there are good opportunities to challenge those students who are gifted and talented. A very wide range of courses is available in the sixth form through good collaboration with other schools and the local college of further education. The school is planning well for changes in 14 to 19 provision.

There is an impressive range of activities on offer at lunchtimes and after school. Participation in the large number of sporting activities is particularly high. Students have many opportunities to go on trips both locally and abroad and to participate in productions. Visiting speakers are well used to widen students' experience.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. This is a caring school where the safety and well-being of students is a top priority. At the same time the school does not over-protect, but seeks to give students responsibility, to help them develop into mature adults capable of making sensible decisions. The school uses adult and student mentors extensively to help those who are vulnerable, lacking in confidence or falling behind with their work. Students feel that any problems will be sorted out and they particularly value the new Assistant Heads of College for their availability as sympathetic listeners. Students receive very thorough advice on choice of courses in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Rigorous academic monitoring is a strong feature of the school. Information on student progress is regularly analysed and a variety of support and intervention is used to help those who are not reaching their potential.

Risk assessments are carried out very thoroughly. Child protection procedures are secure, and vulnerable students are identified and supported very well. Outside agencies train teaching assistants to help students with different problems and disabilities. The very small number of incidents of bullying or racial abuse are treated very seriously. The school nurse has very good systems for recording injuries, administering medication and communicating medical problems to parents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall leadership and management are good and have been instrumental in securing the significant improvements that have been made to all aspects of the school over the previous four years. All issues identified in the previous inspection report have been addressed and there is clear evidence of improvements in each of the areas.

The headteacher and senior leadership team provide clear direction and very strong leadership and have not hesitated to be prescriptive, where required, to deal with underperformance. Difficult decisions have been made when necessary to ensure that the school provides all students with a good quality education. Staff, particularly many of those in middle leadership, have received good professional development in the skills required to provide secure, and often very good, leadership in their own areas. Strong middle leaders are encouraged to be innovative, within a framework of high quality support. The professional development of all teaching staff is focused well on driving up the quality of teaching and learning.

A key to the improvements made by the school is the instigation of extremely rigorous and effective procedures for monitoring, evaluation and review. This now permeates the work of the main school and means that senior and middle leaders know exactly what is working well and where there is room for improvement. There is insufficient systematic monitoring of teaching and learning in the sixth form. Otherwise, self-evaluation makes extensive use of the analysis of a wide range of data, is accurate and used well to secure further improvement.

The involvement of students in the process of evaluation and review, and in directing the course of the school, is outstanding. The systematic evaluation of students' attitudes to the school, the school council's involvement in decision making, students' involvement in lesson observations and the interview process for new staff, and the role of 'student voice' are particularly strong features.

The governing body effectively fulfils a 'critical friend' role to the headteacher and senior leaders. They analyse data to ask the difficult questions to hold the leadership to account, whilst also providing good support and guidance. There is secure financial management and the school provides good value for money.

Despite the highly significant progress that the school has made, there are a small number of aspects that are proving difficult to improve. For example, the results and standards of work in a few subjects do not show the same improvement as in other subjects. The current curriculum management structure is not well equipped to provide the strong subject leadership needed to secure the improvements required.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

8 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Somervale School, Midsomer Norton BA3 2HG

We thoroughly enjoyed visiting your school recently and would like to thank you for all the help you gave us. We very much enjoyed talking to you and were impressed by the way you made us feel very welcome in your school.

We believe that Somervale is a good school. The standards you reach are good and, in the large majority of subjects, you make good progress. This is because much of the teaching is good and you are given clear guidance about how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve. Your good behaviour in most lessons means that everyone can play a full part. Your very positive attitudes to the school have been important in securing the significant improvements the school has made in recent years. Many of you should have more confidence in your own ability, as you really are doing well.

The school provides you with a good curriculum that is well suited to your needs and aspirations. There is good provision in the sixth form, although the school could do a little more in systematically checking that the quality is at least good across all aspects of the sixth form. The wide variety of other activities provided by the school is impressive and the large majority of you make full use of these opportunities. You make very good use of the opportunities provided through the school's specialist media arts status, and participate well in sporting activities. Your involvement in the school and in the wider community is excellent. Your views are carefully considered. The school gives good attention to your overall personal development and the care, guidance and support you receive are excellent. You feel safe and well cared for, and you are confident that there are adults you can go to with problems.

The headteacher and senior managers provide the school with strong leadership. The way in which the school takes account of your views and involves you in many aspects of running the school is outstanding.

The main priority for the school is to improve the quality of work in a small number of subjects to bring it up to the standard of the large majority by improving the way that these subjects are managed.

We wish you the very best for the future.

James Sage Her Majesty's Inspector