

# Severn Vale School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115726
<b>Local Authority</b>	Gloucestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	312044
<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 June 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Andrew Harrett HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1168
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Peter Rudge
<b>Headteacher</b>	Peter Rowland
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 March 2005
<b>School address</b>	School Lane Quedgeley Gloucester GL2 4PR
<b>Telephone number</b>	01452 720458
<b>Fax number</b>	01452 724900

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<b>Age group</b>	11-16
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

This is a larger than average school in which the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. The school has Investor in People status and the Healthy Schools award. It is a specialist technology college.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Severn Vale is a good school in which the students clearly enjoy their education. Good leadership and management enable the students to play a significant role in the running of the school and ensure that their behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching have been tackled so that it is now good overall, engaging the students in their learning well. Consequently, achievement has improved and is now good.

Students enter the school with standards that are broadly in line with the national average, although there are fewer students at the highest attainment levels. Throughout the school, students make excellent progress in English and mathematics. The students' achievement in these crucial subjects is outstanding and their standards are above average. Although there is also good achievement in other subjects, such as history, in some areas the progress made by the students has been much lower. This has pulled down their achievement overall and in the last few years their overall progress in GCSE examinations has consequently been satisfactory, with some areas of real strength, and others of weakness, such as design and technology. Because the progress being made in the current Year 11 is more even, with significant improvements in subjects such as design and technology and science, the progress made by the students is good. The school has not met all its targets for the specialist subjects in science, design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT), but exceeded its targets in mathematics. Similarly, the contribution of these subjects to raising standards in the school and providing support to other schools in the area has been mixed, with mathematics and science having a good impact. The quality of teaching and learning in design and technology seen during the inspection, including the observation of some outstanding lessons, shows that this subject is now poised to make a better contribution.

The improvement in achievement is closely linked to the successful efforts made by the school to raise the overall quality of teaching and learning so that it is closer to the excellent practice which already exists in some subject areas. Although there is still some inconsistency in its quality, the overall improvement is marked and teaching and learning are good. Senior leaders have established clear guidelines to promote good practice, with an emphasis on involving the students productively in learning activities. Very good procedures for managing behaviour not only help teachers to manage the occasional instances of minor disruption swiftly and effectively, but successfully promote positive attitudes to learning.

Another key to the improvement in the students' achievement and to their enjoyment of their education is the attention paid to making sure that students play a genuine part in the running of the school. The school council, school parliament and the various committees to which the students contribute all ensure that the students value the school as a community. The school has also invested time and effort into improving behaviour and attitudes across the school. Initiatives in this area were not chosen because behaviour was a widespread problem, but because the school realised that promoting active involvement in school life and learning was essential to raising standards. The resulting rise in achievement and reduction in exclusions show that this has been a great success. During the inspection, students commented that the 'strong relationships between students and staff' help them to feel safe and secure in school.

Students are served by an appropriate curriculum where provision is reviewed to reflect their changing needs. Students in Key Stage 4 have a satisfactory range of options, including vocational courses. Successful courses are provided in conjunction with a local college of further

education. The school has conducted a curriculum review and the resulting plans for providing a wider range of qualifications and courses are well conceived. Although the curriculum meets most statutory requirements, over half of the students in Years 10 and 11 do not receive their full entitlement to the National Curriculum for ICT.

Good leadership and management have been instrumental in successfully fostering a sense of community. The good quality of the pupils' personal development and well-being, underpinned by effective care, guidance and support, is the direct result of clear vision, drive and good strategic planning. Recent improvements in achievement are the result of accurately identifying areas for development and putting in place effective interventions to tackle them. Although this has reduced the variation in achievement between subjects, some inconsistency in results and in the quality of teaching and learning persists, which is reflected in a variation in the quality of middle leadership in the school. Although there is some excellent practice at this level, procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of departments and for line managing middle leaders have not ensured sufficient consistency in quality or in working practices to raise standards in all areas. Some middle leaders are insufficiently involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. Nevertheless, improvement has been substantial and the school has good capacity to continue this trend.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by making it more consistent so that more of it matches the excellent practice in some subjects.
- Provide the full entitlement to ICT in the school.
- Involve leaders and managers at all levels more effectively in monitoring and evaluating provision.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards are average and students' achievement is good. In English and mathematics, standards are above average and students make outstanding progress by the end of Year 11. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are above average in English and mathematics and average in science. Students make very good progress in their learning in English and mathematics and satisfactory progress in science. The rate of progress in these year groups has increased significantly in recent years.

By the time students leave Year 11, standards are average overall, but above average in English and mathematics. In the GCSE examinations in 2007, achievement in English and mathematics was outstanding and continued a trend of improvement over recent years. Conversely, the overall achievement of the students was satisfactory because of the wide variation in achievement between subjects. This continued a pattern over the last few years. However, initiatives this year have ensured that students' achievement is now better and sustainable in subjects such as science and in design and technology. Although some subjects still lag behind, there is now less unevenness than there was. Consequently, students' achievement is now good overall. Close attention to the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensure that they make good progress.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Students speak positively about the school and show good attitudes to their learning. They report that they enjoy their time in school and during the inspection they behaved well in lessons and around the school. Important factors in increasing their enjoyment of school and raising their achievement are the carefully planned ways in which the school has promoted positive attitudes and behaviour, and consistently valued the students' views and their involvement in the community. Students say they feel safe at school and that incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with appropriately. The school's behaviour policy has contributed greatly to this and the students regard the clarity and consistency with which it is applied as a strength. The student council and student parliament have a real and valid voice in all aspects of school life. Students report that they have made a significant contribution to the behaviour policy and have influenced the menu in the canteen. They have access to healthy food and drink choices, and are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles, to which they respond well. Students appreciate the positive relationships between staff and students. One typical comment was, 'there is always someone to help us'. Excellent provision in English and mathematics and good opportunities for taking responsibility and working together ensure that they develop skills for success in their future life.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and enjoy good relationships with students. Clear learning objectives are shared with the students at the start of lessons. Students make good progress when the objectives are revisited and assessed during lessons. A common feature of the good practice is the use of questioning techniques to probe students' knowledge and understanding and challenge them to think for themselves. Learning support assistants work closely with teachers to ensure those with learning and behaviour difficulties make good progress. A range of varied activities and resources help to engage students in their learning. Behaviour is effectively managed so that learning is not disrupted, and positive attitudes to learning are praised and encouraged by stimulating, purposeful tasks. However, there is not always sufficient challenge and pace in lessons to engage all students' interest and stimulate learning. Occasionally, lesson planning and teaching methods do not take sufficient account of the differing needs and abilities of the students. As a result, some students, often those who are higher attaining, do not make the progress they could. Passive listening by students in some lessons leads to slower progress. Comprehensive assessment data on students are used effectively by some teachers to set challenging targets. Most students understand the level at which they are working. Detailed marking, in subjects such as mathematics, English and history, helps students to know how to improve. There are good examples of involving students themselves in the process of evaluating their work. However, practice in these areas is inconsistent across the school.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 3

Students are served by an appropriate curriculum where provision is reviewed to reflect their changing needs. Higher attaining students are given some opportunities to explore more

demanding avenues of learning. For example, students in science are using sensors linked to computers to monitor the environment and feed their results into a global search engine. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good throughout the school. Students in Key Stage 4 have a satisfactory range of options, including vocational courses. Links with a local college of further education enable students to pursue their interests in areas such as construction and beauty therapy. Other vocational courses, leading to qualifications such as the Diploma in Digital Applications, are provided in school. The school is responsive in tailoring the choice of courses to individual students' preferences. All students undertake work experience. This has led to better involvement and interest for many students. Independent learning is encouraged successfully through special 'flexible learning' days which help to develop good life skills. The curriculum is further enriched by a range of clubs and other out-of-school activities. The overall quality of the curriculum is lowered because not all students receive their full entitlement in ICT.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The quality of care, guidance and support, as observed during the inspection, is good and contributes well to the students' enjoyment of their learning. The school's procedures and systems for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements. Students are supported in their transition from primary schools in a well-planned process that effectively uses students' and parents' views and feedback to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible. The school's social inclusion centre and learning support centre work well to monitor and support those students who are struggling with personal or social problems, or in the general school environment. This has had a very positive impact on keeping students involved in their education and raising achievement. Systems for monitoring and assessing academic progress ensure that students usually know their targets for improvement and what they should do to improve their work, although this is not consistent across all subjects.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The clear vision and strategic planning of senior leaders are responsible for the positive attitudes to learning and sense of community observed during the inspection. Achievement has risen in the school this year because of the actions taken at senior and middle levels of leadership to target particular areas requiring improvement. The excellent leadership in some subjects, such as in English, mathematics and history, has been harnessed to improve the quality of teaching and learning elsewhere. Strategic planning shows that the school has a good sense of what needs to be done to improve provision further. However, the quality of subject leadership is variable, particularly in the monitoring of teaching and learning in different subjects, with most of this work being conducted by senior managers. Although line management of middle leaders by the senior team is satisfactory, it requires more rigour and regularity and a closer attention to ensuring common approaches are established and successful strategies shared. Target setting is improving in the school and there is now evidence that targets are becoming more challenging and so are more likely to help raise achievement. The governing body provides the school with good challenge and support. The school has taken effective steps to improve performance since the last inspection.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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
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**

7 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Severn Vale School, Gloucester, GL2 4PR

Thank you for the mature and helpful way in which you contributed to the recent inspection of your school. We were very impressed by your politeness and ability to express your views clearly.

We decided that yours is a good school. We were particularly impressed by the way in which the leaders and managers of the school have ensured that you can play a real part in running affairs through the school council, parliament and other avenues. During the inspection, you told us that you feel safe in school and that you enjoy your education. This year, you have been making better progress than previously in your subjects and your achievement is good. In English and mathematics, it is excellent. This is because the overall quality of teaching in the school is good, meaning that you learn well and that the difference between subjects is not as large as it was.

To make sure that things continue to improve, we have asked the school to do a number of things. There is still some inconsistency between subjects and we want the school to tackle this by making sure that leaders and managers monitor the quality even more rigorously. We think that it would be beneficial for the subject leaders to be more involved in this. We also want the school to make sure that all of you get the opportunity to study ICT, to which you are entitled. Because your school has a good tradition of consulting you, you can help the school to do these things by sharing your opinions in the established ways.

I wish you and the school good luck in your future development.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Harrett Her Majesty's Inspector

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Her Majesty's Inspector