

The Avon Valley School and Performing Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125764
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	315309
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Joyce HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1071
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Arthur Webster
Headteacher	Don O'Neill
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2004
School address	Newbold Road Newbold-on-Avon Rugby CV21 1EH
Telephone number	01788 542355
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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

The Avon Valley School and Performing Arts College is a larger than average school situated on the outskirts of Rugby. It is a popular and oversubscribed school with the majority of students being from a White British background and most speaking English as their first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is above average. Although there is a wide spread of individual attainment on entry, a significant number of students enter the school with low literacy skills. The number of students eligible for free school meals is slightly below the national average. The school was designated a performing arts specialist school in September 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that serves its students and the local community well. Following a period of considerable disruption caused by a major fire and by significant changes to the senior leadership team, staff have worked hard to ensure students have not been disadvantaged. The school is rightly proud of the safe, caring and supportive environment that enables students to learn and make good progress.

The relatively new school building provides a welcoming and pleasant learning environment that is well respected by students. Resources in performing arts and in the physical education (PE) curriculum are excellent. The school's specialist status as a performing arts college has a significant impact in raising aspirations and in developing students' self-confidence and self-esteem. This assists in raising standards in the wider curriculum, although the specialist status is not yet used to its full potential to promote improvements in teaching and learning and to raise standards throughout all subjects.

Teaching and learning are good overall and students speak highly of the support provided by staff. Students are making good progress as a result and standards are rising. The standards older students reach are currently broadly average. Typically, lessons are well planned and most engage students in some form of practical activity. When students are actively participating in lessons they are well motivated, learn quickly and make good progress. However, in a small minority of lessons, although satisfactory overall, too much teacher-centred activity limits learning and progress. In these lessons, because students are not fully engaged, low-level disruption often slows the pace of learning and teachers do not always effectively manage this. The strategies used for behaviour management are not fully understood by all staff and there are inconsistencies in approach.

The good curriculum provides students with a wide range of opportunities that broaden their horizons and enable good personal development. The curriculum is well matched to meet individual students' needs and a range of academic and vocational pathways are provided. These pathways, together with the teaching of finance and budgeting skills, enable students to develop good skills that contribute to their future economic well-being. Through the extended schools programme and the extensive range of extra-curricular activities, the school has good links with the local community and students make a good contribution to both the local and school communities. Fund-raising activities are extensive and the student council is active and ensures students are involved in the decision-making process.

Healthy lifestyles are extremely well promoted and the food available in the refectory provides students with a choice of healthy eating options. Participation rates in sporting activities are exceptionally high and a considerable number of students either walk or cycle to school. Students adopt safe practices and are made aware of the dangers associated with smoking, alcohol and drug use. They receive good care, guidance and support and pastoral arrangements are particularly effective. Academic guidance and support continue to improve with student progress being frequently reviewed against set targets. In some subjects, academic guidance and support are more effective than in others and greater consistency is required in the use of targets and progress data to enable more timely support to be provided to students identified as not making the progress expected.

Leadership and management are good. Strong leadership is focused on improving teaching and learning and the students' experiences. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are good and

the school's self-evaluation is accurate. Development and improvement planning are detailed. The school has a good local reputation and works very effectively with a number of other providers. As demonstrated by the rising standards and continued improvement, the school has a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that all lessons engage students fully and that staff apply behaviour management strategies consistently to eliminate low-level disruption.
- Ensure all staff use student targets and progress data consistently to provide timely support for students identified as not achieving their full potential.
- Use the school's specialist status to raise the standard of teaching and learning and student attainment across the wider curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good progress and the standards they achieve are rising across the school. Although many students arrive at the school with broadly average levels of prior attainment overall, many others have poor literacy skills and below average reading ages. Some of the older year groups had below average standards on entry. Good arrangements for identifying and supporting students with additional learning needs and good teaching enable most students to make good progress and to achieve the challenging targets they are set. Students make better progress during Years 10 and 11 where tracking and monitoring procedures are used more effectively to provide guidance and support.

The standards achieved by students in national tests and public examinations in 2007 were broadly average overall. School performance data clearly shows a continuing trend of rising standards. In 2007, a significantly higher proportion of students than average achieved five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C and the number of students gaining these higher grades in English and mathematics also improved when compared to the previous year. The increasing number of students on vocational or vocationally related qualifications made good progress and achieved high standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students show respect for their school and for people of different cultures and beliefs. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and students have a strong sense of empathy with others less fortunate than they are. The school is a safe and inclusive environment where students are encouraged to look out for each other. Healthy lifestyles are extremely well promoted throughout the curriculum and students make sensible choices about their diet and demonstrate an excellent understanding of the need to keep fit and healthy. Attendance rates at the many sporting clubs and activities the school offers are very high.

Students raise substantial funds for charity and make a good contribution to both the local and school communities. They actively contribute views and opinions to help the school to improve. Most students enjoy school life and like the opportunities to take part in performing arts activities that they say help them grow in confidence. The curriculum enables students to develop good work-related skills that contribute very effectively to their future economic well-being. Most students are eager to learn and behave sensibly. In a small minority of lessons,

however, learning is interrupted by low-level disruptive behaviour and this is a concern to some parents and carers. Strategies to improve students' attendance are beginning to have a positive impact and attendance rates are improving, despite a small number of families persisting in taking their children away on holiday during term time.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and enables students to make good progress. Typically, teachers plan lessons well and use a variety of teaching methods that engage and motivate students. Relationships between teachers and students are good and learning support assistants work effectively with teachers to ensure students who find learning difficult are well supported. Information and communication technology is used to good effect and both teachers and students benefit from high quality up-to-date equipment. Teaching and learning in PE and in the performing arts is generally very good and students thoroughly enjoy these lessons.

In a small minority of lessons where teaching does not sufficiently motivate or engage students, low-level disruptive behaviour slows the pace of learning. Expectations of behaviour in lessons vary between different teachers and different standards are applied, causing students to become confused between what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. The monitoring and marking of students' homework and classwork is generally good, although a few teachers do not provide constructive feedback to students detailing what they need to do to improve further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is broad and balanced. It enables good personal development and is particularly effective in developing skills that contribute to students' future economic well-being and in encouraging students to lead healthy lifestyles. The programme for personal, social and health education, including citizenship, is good and students speak highly of the activities they undertake, which include various themed days. Curriculum pathways have been successfully developed and ensure most students have access to a wide range of academic and vocational course options. The curriculum is frequently reviewed and is flexible, allowing changes to be made to reflect the needs and interests of different year groups.

The performing arts curriculum contributes significantly to raising students' confidence and aspirations and, as a result, assists in raising overall standards. At Key Stage 3, the performing arts curriculum is successful in engaging students and all undertake a GCSE during Year 9. However, during Years 10 and 11, the number of students studying a performing arts qualification is low and, as acknowledged by curriculum leaders, the specialism is not yet integrated across the curriculum and used to raise attainment levels in all subjects as effectively as it could be.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students receive good care, guidance and support. Pastoral arrangements are strong and students speak highly of the personal support they receive from their year group tutors. Transition arrangements from primary school are planned well and enable students who join

the school in Year 7 to settle quickly and learn school routines. Procedures for safeguarding students are rigorous and are reviewed regularly. Health and safety policies and procedures are comprehensive and risk assessments are detailed and up-to-date.

Students are supported well throughout the school and this helps them make good progress. They are set individual targets for all subjects that are appropriately challenging. Many teachers regularly review, update and encourage students to use their targets but, as with teachers' marking, practice is inconsistent. A small minority of teachers do not use student performance data to provide additional support in a timely manner to ensure students achieve to their fullest potential. Careers advice and guidance is good and increasing numbers of students are continuing in education post-16.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is well supported by two deputy headteachers and an extended leadership team that provides good and strong leadership focused on raising standards and improving students' experiences. The school's self-evaluation correctly identifies the main strengths and areas for improvement and plans to address identified issues are comprehensive and set a clear direction for the school. Leadership of subjects within the school's specialism is effective, although targets set for participation and standards at Key Stage 4 have not been achieved since designation.

Middle leaders are beginning to take more responsibility for monitoring, evaluating and improving areas for which they are responsible and their capacity to do so is improving. However, the monitoring in some areas is more robust than in others and practices are not consistent across the school. Governors provide good support to the school and are becoming increasingly effective at providing challenge in order to hold the school to account for its performance. Challenging targets are set to improve performance and increasingly, these are being achieved. The school promotes equality of opportunity well and has appropriate policies and procedures in place to do so. Accommodation and resources for teaching and learning are excellent and staff are deployed effectively.

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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 ¹ 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

27 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Avon Valley School and Performing Arts College, Rugby, CV21 1EH.

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited to inspect your school. The comments you made during our meetings helped us to form our judgements about your school. This letter is to tell you about the outcome of the inspection.

We were pleased to hear that most of you enjoy school life and that you think the opportunities provided for you are good. Many of you were keen to tell us that you attend a good school with good facilities, especially in the performing arts and in PE. It was also pleasing for us to hear that you think your teachers are supportive and help you to achieve.

We found your school to be a good school that serves you well. It provides a safe and caring environment where, as a result of good teaching and support, most of you make good progress. The curriculum enables you to study a good range of both academic and vocational courses and helps you to develop well as young people. You gain a thorough understanding of the need to lead healthy lifestyles and develop skills and knowledge that help you progress to further study or into the world of work. We identified some areas where the school could improve and have asked the school to do the following things.

- Make sure that all lessons engage you fully and that staff apply behaviour management strategies consistently to eliminate low-level disruption.
- Ensure all staff use targets and progress data consistently to provide timely support if you are not making the progress expected.
- Use the school's specialist status to further raise the standard of teaching and learning and to improve your levels of attainment in all subjects.

You will be pleased to know that because of good leadership and management your headteacher is aware of the need to make these improvements. You can help him and the school staff by continuing to cooperate and to work hard in all of your lessons. We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Joyce Her Majesty's Inspector