

# Avon Valley College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	126459
<b>Local Authority</b>	Wiltshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	315558
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 March 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Caroline McKee

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>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	637
6th form	61
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Vacant Position
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rowena Brookes
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 March 2004
<b>School address</b>	Recreation Road Durrington Salisbury SP4 8HH
<b>Telephone number</b>	01980 652467
<b>Fax number</b>	01980 653568

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<b>Age group</b>	11-18
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Avon Valley College is a smaller than average secondary school, with a small sixth form that has recently been reopened. It is a designated specialist sports college and holds the Healthy Schools Award, Sportsmark Award and Investor in People accreditation. The attainment on entry of students to the college is below average. A higher than average proportion of students has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Almost all the students are of White British heritage. The college has a high proportion of students from service families.

## 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 and innovative college, which is ambitious for further improvement and has strength and depth in its management. The good leadership of the college has made significant improvements against all the issues identified in the last inspection and the college is well placed to make further improvements. It is a college that vigorously promotes the full inclusion of students with a wide range of needs. The principal is well supported by the governors and management team who are well aware of strengths and areas for improvement.

Standards currently at the end of Key Stage 4 are broadly average and the students make good progress from their starting points. This is an improvement as standards have been below average for the previous three years. Teachers now set students challenging targets and track their progress carefully, enabling them to achieve well. The good teaching provides a range of tasks that stimulates the students to learn well. However, students do not have enough opportunities to learn independently and actively in lessons. This is recognised by the college and plans are in place to further develop these skills, giving better preparation for the world of work and further education. The college has recently opened a vocational centre which contributes to the good and improving curriculum. Although new courses are beginning to address these learning weaknesses, many students do not have great confidence when speaking. Until recently the curriculum in the sixth form had been narrowly focused on A levels, which were unsuited to many of the students. The introduction of a broader range of applied and vocational courses has helped sixth form standards to improve; they are now broadly average and students achieve satisfactorily. The students' welfare teams provided by the college give good support to the students and particularly those with personal or family problems. This, together with the extensive range of pastoral support, ensures that there are ample opportunities for all students to talk to trusted adults. As a result, students feel that the college provides a safe, secure and supportive environment. A few students are concerned about some smoking taking place in college and about some poor behaviour in a few lessons. Behaviour in college is satisfactory overall, but marred by a very small minority of students whose poor attitudes to learning slow their own progress and that of others. Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and are well supported through counselling, individual programmes of study and detailed tracking of their achievements. Teaching assistants play a valuable part in this.

The college works effectively with other partners, such as the local military establishments and local primary schools, and ensures that students are prepared well for their chosen pathways during and when they leave the college. Students enjoy college and attendance has improved in recent years so that it is now satisfactory. Students are increasingly consulted on college issues and the year and college forums are helping to bring about positive changes to college life. The college has effective systems in place to seek the views of parents.

The specialist sports status has a positive impact in improving students' achievements across many aspects of the curriculum. Students are well aware of the need to stay healthy and many are actively involved in the sporting life of the college. Older students enjoy the opportunity to participate in the sports leaders' awards and enjoy encouraging pupils from local primary schools to participate in sport.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory but improving standard of education. The students' attainment at the time they start their courses in Year 12 is much lower than in most sixth forms. In A-level courses, they make satisfactory progress but the standards they reach are below the national average, with very few students gaining the highest grades. Many students find difficulty in adjusting to the academic demands of A level, which has prompted the school to introduce a small number of alternative vocational courses such as Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national certificates in sport and performing arts. The results on these courses, in 2007, were notably better than previous A levels and helped to improve overall achievement. Teaching and learning are generally good, although students are not confident contributors to lessons. Nevertheless, their personal development is satisfactory and they enjoy their education. They particularly enjoy the opportunities to work with local primary school pupils and would like to take on further responsibilities within the college. They rightly feel that the care and guidance they receive from staff are good.

The college leaders provide the sixth form with a good sense of direction. There are good plans to extend the college's shared arrangements with other sixth forms in the next academic year. This well-judged initiative broadens the range of courses available to students as well as helping the school to be more efficient in the use of the resources it commits to post-16 education.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Develop students' independence and self-confidence, especially in their speaking skills.
- Improve the behaviour and attitudes to learning of a very small minority of students so that they become more responsible for their own actions in lessons and around the school.
- Raise standards in the sixth form by broadening its curriculum.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

#### Grade for sixth form: 3

Given their below average standards on entry, students achieve well by Year 11. The college is successfully raising standards by broadening the curriculum with adult numeracy and literacy courses and by generally improving teaching. As a result, although standards at GCSE have been consistently below the national average in the last three years, standards are now broadly average in Year 11. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress throughout the college because of the good care and support provided. This is also the case for young people from service families.

Results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were below average in 2007 but students achieved well overall given their low standards on entry. There was considerable improvement in English test results between 2006 and 2007 with students' rates of progress moving from well below expectation to well above. Standards for current Year 9 students are average and they make good progress. They are on track to meet their challenging targets for 2008.

In the sixth form, students' achievement is satisfactory. Standards are generally below average but have risen as the range of courses on offer has become more suited to students' interests, skills and capabilities.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Students enjoy college and most have positive attitudes. The students value being part of a sports college especially because of the excellent range of sporting activities on offer. They have a good understanding of the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and have strong views on the range and cost of canteen food. They enjoy contributing to college life and making decisions through the student forum, and there is enthusiasm for charity fund raising and community events. They also value the new vocational centre which helps them develop a satisfactory range of skills needed for the next stages of education and work. Students feel safe and say that bullying is dealt with effectively. They understand the potential dangers faced by young people. Programmes to deter unhealthy life choices, such as 'Quit' smoking, are given high priority. This is starting to have an impact on decreasing the few incidents of smoking on the college site and on the buses. The majority of students behave well and are eager to be trusted and given responsibility. However, a very small minority show less positive attitudes resulting in poor behaviour around the college and in some lessons. This prompts concerns from a few parents and students. The students' spiritual, moral and social development is satisfactory. Their cultural development is good and students enjoy learning about other ways of life, talking enthusiastically about their links with South Africa.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Students are able to make good progress because of the good and improving quality of teaching. Lessons are well planned to meet the varying needs of the students and tracking data is used effectively, especially when looking at students who enter the college at different starting points. The most able students are given challenging targets and respond well. Students make rapid progress when expectations are high and when teaching provokes thought. The students thrive in situations where they are given responsibility for their own learning but there are too few opportunities to develop these skills, as well as a shortage of tasks that help them to improve their confidence when speaking. The college has recognised this and is working on developing these skills through the influence of the sports college expertise in teaching methods which encourage students to take more initiative. Good marking gives students a clear understanding of how well they are doing and lets them know how to improve their work. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well taught and supported effectively by teaching assistants.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The college has an innovative and flexible curriculum that meets the needs of individuals. It is particularly effective in integrating young people from service families when they arrive at different stages of their education. In Years 10 and 11, there are opportunities to follow a good

range of vocational courses and GCSEs. The sixth form curriculum, however, has been until recently narrowly focused on A levels and this has constrained students' achievement. Across the school, the recently introduced arrangements to develop skills needed in life (such as business skills, financial understanding and work related activities) are impressive. These are starting to have an impact on the students' knowledge and specifically organised enterprise days are greatly valued. Performing arts courses and activities are well established and enjoyed. The sports college positively influences many areas of the curriculum such as developing students' leadership skills in physical education, and working with younger students in mathematics and modern foreign languages. Their work with primary schools has further improved students' organisation skills. Revision sessions give added support to help students to reach their target grades. There is an outstanding range of additional activities in which many students participate regularly.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The college offers good care, guidance and support to its students. The guidance given for their choice of courses for GCSE and A level and for life outside of college enables them to make informed choices. Thorough tracking procedures ensure that teachers are able to give the guidance required for students to make good progress towards achieving their test and examination target levels and grades.

The sound procedures for behaviour management are mostly effective, though there are some inconsistencies in application by less experienced teachers. The college is particularly effective in coordinating programmes for students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those who find mainstream education a challenge. The college knows their families very well and good management structures ensure that information is systematically shared with all relevant staff and supporting external agencies. Very good links with local schools and military bases enable students to quickly settle into college life. One parent wrote, 'Thanks to the care, compassion and professionalism of the staff, my son settled without any worries.' All required child protection procedures are in place and regularly reviewed.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The principal has provided the college with a strong lead that has underpinned a substantial and sustained improvement in its performance. Her style of leadership is allowing other managers to start to take effective roles in the college's development. In order to do this, the college introduced a radically different management structure in September 2007. Middle managers now have more responsibility, for example to plan monitoring activities and to allocate resources in their areas. This arrangement addresses the concerns about the effectiveness of the middle tier of management raised in the previous inspection. The principal has also been instrumental in developing the capacity of the governing body to have a much stronger voice. The chair of the governing body provides tireless support and has a perceptive analysis of where the college needs to improve. Resources are very well deployed, for example the appointment of pastoral assistants for each of Years 7 to 11, with the particular aim of ensuring that children of service

families achieve as well as other students. This has proved a very successful initiative. However, the college has not yet ensured that the behaviour policy is consistently applied by all teachers for a very small minority of students.

The college leaders demonstrate a very clear sense of direction for the future. Their thorough and accurate self-evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses ensures that the priorities for the college's improvement are very well gauged and planned. These priorities are rightly headed up by the intention to improve students' personal learning and thinking skills. There is a highly competent use of data both to scrutinise achievement and set targets to challenge students and raise their achievement.



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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	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	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
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	3	

### 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	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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	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	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

14 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Avon Valley College, Durrington, SP4 8HH

Thank you very much for welcoming me and my colleagues to the college. We enjoyed talking to you and hearing your views. This letter is to tell you what we found.

Your college is providing you with a good and improving standard of education in Years 7 to 11. The standards you reach are broadly average and you make good progress because of the good teaching you receive. In the sixth form, your progress is satisfactory and you attain broadly average standards. The senior staff provide good leadership and have a clear view of how the college can improve. We noted that you prefer lessons that give you a chance to be more independent. The good curriculum is now providing you with a greater range of courses, which helps to prepare you for the world of work and further education. There is a satisfactory and improving curriculum in the sixth form.

You told us that you enjoy coming to the college and particularly like taking part in the extra-curricular activities. You receive good support and guidance which enable you to feel safe and help you to know what to do to improve your work. You are well advised on your choices at various stages of college life. We were impressed with how you help around the college and in the community and in the increasingly good work done by the college forums, particularly in trying to improve how healthily you eat. Behaviour in lessons and around the college is satisfactory, but in a few lessons we saw that you are not able to make progress when a very small minority of students continually chatter and make little attempt to learn. You know how to behave, but a few chose not to on some occasions. Parents are also concerned about this. As a result, your personal development overall is only satisfactory.

- In order to improve achievement we have asked the school to:
- Develop your independence and self-confidence, especially in your speaking skills.
- Improve a very small minority of students' behaviour and attitudes to learning so that you become more responsible for your own actions, in lessons and around the school.
- Raise standards in the sixth form by broadening its curriculum.

We wish you every success for your future.

Caroline McKee Lead inspector

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Lead inspector