

# Backwell School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	132005
<b>Local Authority</b>	North Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	315899
<b>Inspection date</b>	20 November 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mary Massey 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>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1652
Sixth form	355
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Margaret Edwards
<b>Headteacher</b>	Julian Baldwin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 September 2004
<b>School address</b>	Station Road Backwell Bristol BS48 3BX
<b>Telephone number</b>	01275 463371
<b>Fax number</b>	01275 463077

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the college and investigated the following:

the progress made by all students

the impact of provision, including specialist status, on students' learning

the effectiveness of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and vulnerable groups

how effectively the school's leaders and managers analyse and use data from all sources for future planning in order to raise achievement.

Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, scrutiny of students' work and teachers' planning, discussions with students and staff, the views of parents and a scrutiny of the school's documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

Backwell School is large and oversubscribed. About half the students travel into school by bus. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage and only a small proportion are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is close to the national average but the overall proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low, although it varies from year to year. Over half of these students have specific learning or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and a few students have visual or hearing impairment or physical disability. The school has had visual and performing arts specialist status since 2004. It is also a Training School and has the Healthy Schools and Investors in People awards.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Backwell is an outstanding school. Parents describe it as a 'super school' that meets the needs of students with a wide range of abilities, aspirations and aptitudes very effectively. Students are articulate, confident and proud of their school. They enjoy their learning and this is evident from their behaviour and outstanding levels of attendance.

Attainment is well above the national average and this represents outstanding progress from students' starting points, which are just above the national average. At Key Stage 3, students of all abilities make exceptional progress and the school builds on this very effectively at Key Stage 4. The proportion of students who achieve five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics has increased year on year and is well above the national average. Current data show that students in the current Year 11 are on track to achieve as well in 2009. The difference between boys' and girls' achievement is narrower than that found nationally. The school takes care to analyse thoroughly the achievement of vulnerable groups of students, even though the numbers are very small, to ensure that support is provided where it is needed. Strong support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures that they, too, make exceptional progress.

Students' achievement is outstanding because the majority of teaching is at least good and much is outstanding. In the best lessons, teaching is interesting and stimulating, and work is matched closely to students' needs. Students are given effective subject-specific feedback that makes clear exactly what they need to do in order to improve. Parents and students describe the commitment of staff, who they believe are concerned for the success of each individual, identifying those that are underachieving quickly and putting extra support in place. However, some inconsistency still exists within the school. Developing the role of middle managers is a school priority, but some heads of department are not yet sufficiently focused on encouraging teachers to share their good practice to improve the quality of students' learning.

Visual and performing arts status permeates an exceptionally rich curriculum that motivates and enthuses students, so they enjoy their learning very much. The introduction this year of the new creative and media diploma courses and very popular Year 7 Breakout days is an example of the way in which the school uses the curriculum to develop students' skills, widen their cultural experiences, and encourage community cohesion. Weaknesses in the provision of information and communication technology at the time of the last inspection have now been remedied and younger students talk enthusiastically about the skills they are developing. Adjustment of the curriculum for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent, especially for those who have disabilities. An exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular activities is available both at lunchtime and after school, with a particularly high take-up in sport and the performing arts.

Parents describe the concern the school shows for every student and the prompt response they receive to any query. The vertical house system ensures that each student is known very well so the advice they are given as they transfer from one stage of education to the next is very personal, particularly as they move into courses or employment at the end of Year 11. Students of all ages feel safe in school, believe that any bullying issues will be dealt with effectively and know that there is always someone available to go to if they have a problem. Although they are very aware of the need to stay healthy through physical exercise and sensible eating, some students and parents feel that the school's current provision for school meals does not support

this as well as it could. There are many occasions when students are able to make a positive contribution to the wider community, through fund-raising, sporting and performing and visual arts activities. Although sixth formers make a valuable contribution to supporting younger students, this opportunity is not so easily available to Year 11 students.

The school is led and managed very effectively by the headteacher and the leadership team. They have created a positive, 'can-do' atmosphere amongst both staff and students, which gives everyone confidence to perform at their maximum. Exceptionally thorough data analysis and regular monitoring of both performance and new initiatives mean that the school knows its strengths and weaknesses very well. The information collected leads to ambitious planning and constant efforts to improve provision. Targets are challenging and implemented at all levels, from the whole school through departments to individual teachers and students. The rising trend in achievement for students in recent years indicates an outstanding capacity to improve further. The school's approach to promoting community cohesion is outstanding. There are particularly strong links with the local community and students are developing a wide understanding of both international and British multicultural issues. The school works very well with other agencies to support students. However, some parents feel that it would be useful for them to have more information about how they can best support their children's learning. The school does not systematically seek the views of all parents.

Although there have been some improvements, many of the school buildings are in a poor state of repair. This has an impact on learning in some subjects, on the range of activities that can be offered both to students and to the wider community, and thus on the school's ability to extend and improve the curriculum even further.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 1**

A high proportion of students in Year 11 choose to stay on at Backwell, because they enjoy the atmosphere in the school and are appreciative of the very high quality teaching and support they receive and the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities available. Students in the sixth form make outstanding progress and achieve results in a range of courses that are well above the national average. Visual and performing arts status has led to the introduction of the creative and media diploma in September 2008 in addition to a range of other courses linked to the specialism. Take-up of mathematics and science at both A and AS level is particularly high and reflects the enthusiasm with which students approach these subjects in the main school.

The care, guidance and support students receive are outstanding. Students describe personalised and thoughtful feedback from teachers, many of whom 'go the extra mile' to give them the help they need to succeed. They describe an atmosphere of constant encouragement and belief in their ability to do well. Many of them make regular commitments to work with and support younger students as well as a range of activities that take them out into the wider community. Guidance provided for future careers or education beyond the sixth form is personalised and comprehensive.

The sixth form is led and managed exceptionally well. Data are analysed as effectively as in the main school. This leads to constantly improving provision.

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

- Improve further the quality of teaching and learning by sharing existing good practice through increased involvement of heads of department.
- Ensure that all parents' views are actively sought and that they are well informed about actions the school is taking to improve provision.

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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	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

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<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.



## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	1	

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	1
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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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	

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

21 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Backwell School, Bristol BS48 3BX

You will recall that inspectors visited your school recently. I would like to thank you for the very enthusiastic way you talked about the quality of the education you receive at Backwell. In return, I would like to tell you about our findings. I am sure that many of you will want to read the whole report on [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Backwell is an outstanding school. Students of all abilities achieve exceptionally well and make outstanding progress. This is largely a result of some very good teaching and a very broad and interesting curriculum. Visual and performing arts specialist status enhances the range of activities provided, both in and beyond the classroom. Creative ways of managing learning, for example on the Year 7 Breakout days, have not only made learning more exciting but have also increased the skills that you are developing.

You also told me that many teachers 'go the extra mile' to support and help you, giving extra time and encouragement when you are finding the work hard. We found a very positive atmosphere in school, with behaviour in lessons often exceptionally good. Your attendance, too, is well above the national average and this must mean that you are enjoying being at school very much.

There are still some improvements that can be made, so we have made two recommendations. We have asked the school:

- to improve the quality of teaching and learning even further by involving heads of department to ensure the skills of the best teachers are shared
- to ensure that the school asks for all parents' views and that parents are well informed about the improvements that are being made.

Your school is very well led and managed by the headteacher and his team. I am sure you will support them in trying to make it even better.

With very best wishes to you all

Mary Massey Her Majesty's Inspector