

Devizes School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126506
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	328512
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Kenneth (Ken) Bush

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1232
Sixth form	177
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Halpin
Headteacher	Malcolm Irons
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2005
School address	The Green Devizes SN10 3AG
Telephone number	01380 724886
Fax number	01380 720955

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Devizes School is a large school that has had specialist sports college status since 2004. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below that found nationally. The percentage of students identified by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average. The school has a small, designated unit catering for students with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. The great majority of students are of White British origin and very few speak English as an additional language. Devizes gained the Healthy School Award in 2005 and has Investors in People and Sportsmark status. It is a member of the North Wiltshire Federation of Secondary Schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Devizes is an effective and rapidly improving school that provides its students with a good standard of education. The headteacher is an extremely good leader and gives strong direction and a clear vision for improvement which is now permeating all levels of school provision. He is well supported by an enthusiastic and able senior leadership team. New appointments in key subject leadership positions, notably in English and mathematics, have significantly strengthened the quality of leadership and management in the school, and it has an outstanding capacity to improve.

The standards attained by students by the end of Year 11 are above average and improving. Most middle and higher ability students achieve well in a range of subjects, notably English, mathematics, science, physical education and design and technology. Less able students have not in the past achieved as well as they should, but this situation is gradually being rectified through better teaching and more tailored intervention programmes that are applied more quickly. The curriculum is now broad and balanced and matches most students' needs and capabilities well, although the improvements in Key Stage 4 are quite recent and not yet fully embedded. School leaders and managers are becoming increasingly proficient in responding creatively to national initiatives, such as the development of a skills-based curriculum at Key Stage 3. Planning is also now at an advanced stage to introduce the 14–19 Diploma in 2010. Teaching and learning are good in most lessons, and work is mostly well matched to students' capabilities and interests. Assessment supports students' achievement well, although there is some variability in the quality of marking. Information about students' progress is often used effectively to plan the next stages of learning and set well-focused individual targets.

Students' personal development and well-being are good overall, and in some respects outstanding. The provision to promote healthy lifestyles, particularly through out-of-school activities, is exemplary and students greatly appreciate the quality and range of opportunities afforded to them. Students across the age range thoroughly enjoy coming to school and feel they are well prepared for adult life. Skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are well developed, and the newly established House system is contributing to students' sense of responsibility for others and instilling a greater feeling of belonging. Good quality care and support arrangements are in place so that all students, including the most vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, such as those in the dyslexia unit, feel valued, and most make good progress. Behaviour is good overall, particularly around the school site. Where occasionally it falls below that standard, it is dealt with appropriately by staff. Academic guidance procedures in the main school are outstanding with very effective systems in place for tracking students' progress. A very small minority of parents expressed concerns about poor communication between school and home, but in general parents are very supportive of how the leadership team is striving to take the school forward.

The sports specialism has had an immense impact on the quality of education provided by the school. It is led extremely well by a highly motivated and skilled group of teachers who continuously seek, and secure, improvement in many aspects of the school's work. Standards are consistently well above average in the specialist subjects (which include ICT) and achievement is excellent. There is clear evidence that the work of the specialist subjects is having a positive impact on raising standards in other subjects in the school and in leading the introduction of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills. It has developed a hugely successful out-of-hours learning programme as part of 'Devizes Xtra' as well as a number of community-linked projects

to help adults with low self-esteem to develop confidence and social skills. Its 'Dreams and Teams' sporting and cultural programme has contributed well to the school's rising awareness of global issues. The work of the specialist subjects is evaluated regularly and its challenging targets have been met. The director of specialism is highly regarded in the local authority and has excellent support from her highly effective team.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good quality of education. Standards in the sixth form are above average and students' progress, especially in their second year, is good. Most students complete their two-year courses and attain above average results at A level. In 2008 over 85% of students proceeded straight into higher and further education and the rest into employment. However, over the past two years a significant number of students have left the school at the end of the first year. The school is acutely aware of this and its procedures to improve the staying-on rate are having a positive effect. Teaching and learning are good and students particularly value the support they get from working closely with staff who know them well. Teachers are beginning to use the new and more helpful assessment information to ensure that students who experience difficulties in their first year are kept on track and are motivated to make better progress. Students are offered a good choice of advanced academic courses and the curriculum is being broadened to include more vocational and applied courses. Diploma work is scheduled to begin in the near future. Students feel comfortable and secure in the sixth form, take opportunities to contribute to managing their own environment, take leadership of many school activities, for example mentoring younger students, and serve the wider community well through charity work and especially helping with sporting activities. Students' personal development is good. They are confident, articulate and have well-developed social skills. The leadership of the head of sixth form and his deputy is effective and recruitment has improved in recent years.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure teachers use information about students' achievements more effectively when planning lessons so that every student can make better progress, especially in Key Stage 4 and Year 12.
- Ensure the recent curricular changes in Key Stage 4 are fully and consistently implemented, and lead to better achievement for all learners.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students typically join Devizes with levels of attainment that are broadly average. By the end of Year 9, both standards and rates of progress are above average, with performance in English, in particular, on a rising trend. Students' attainment by the end of Year 11 is now above the national average and improving, having experienced a dip in 2006 and 2007. Performance in English, mathematics and, most notably, science rose significantly in 2008, as did the proportion of students who gained the highest GCSE grades generally. Attainment across the full range of subjects is now far more consistent than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Progress in Years 10 and 11 is good overall and is improving as a consequence of better teaching and strong subject leadership.

The school has put great efforts into developing innovative systems for identifying students who are at risk of not achieving to their potential, and providing them with additional targeted

support. For most students, this is working very well. However, in the recent past, lower ability students improved their work at a slower rate than their peers and their progress, therefore, has been only satisfactory. By providing a curriculum more suited to their needs, as the school is now doing, there are early indications that these students are now beginning to make better progress. The progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities does not significantly differ from that of other students. Students attain good grades at A level. The school's procedures for securing students' better progress and retention in Year 12 are beginning to have a positive impact on current achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Specialist sports college status contributes significantly to the students' personal development and well-being. Participation rates for the extremely wide range and variety of extra-curricular activities are very high. Active promotion of healthy lifestyles is also a high priority for the school and students understand what it means to eat and live healthily. The school provides a safe and secure environment in which all students are aware of where they may go if in need of support. The school has a well-structured programme of anti-bullying measures, and if students consider they are being bullied there is always an adult they can turn to in order to talk over personal concerns. The vast majority of students really enjoy their experience of school, feel they are encouraged to do their best and are well supported by staff. Attendance is on an improving trend and is in line with national averages.

A few parents expressed concerns about behaviour in classes. Inspectors found that the majority of students behave well but a small minority can disrupt lessons. However, the school addresses these incidents robustly and students say behaviour is generally good and fixed-term exclusions are falling. A large number of students contribute to the community by supporting local primary children in sporting activities. There is strong evidence of literacy, numeracy and ICT contributing to students' future economic well-being, although the enterprise element is as yet embryonic. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, being largely integrated across the curriculum, with good practice in the personal, social and health education programme and the ethics courses. Sixth form students' personal development is good and most students have a high level of satisfaction with the courses they have chosen. Students have a good range of opportunities to demonstrate their leadership abilities, such as in mentoring younger students, working in the school council and participating in the debating society. The school's specialism has provided a very wide range of opportunities for students to demonstrate their leadership skills and large numbers work in local schools and clubs.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students mostly make good progress in their lessons and show good attitudes to their work. Teaching is effective and teachers' good subject knowledge lends confidence to their teaching styles. Relationships between teachers and students are good and are built upon mutual respect. When high expectations and clear boundaries are set by teachers, students behave well and enjoy lessons. There is good use of ICT as a teaching aid to add variety and interest to lessons. In the better lessons, a range of effective assessment techniques help students understand the

focus of the lesson and what they need to do to make good progress. Students show an ability to work independently and are aware of what they need to do to improve.

The new assessment system is a very effective tool to inform progress and is beginning to be used more rigorously by teachers to ensure lesson activities meet the needs of all students, although in the less effective lessons, the pace of activities is still too slow. Successful mentoring and intervention programmes are in place to support those students who have slipped behind in their work and have become disaffected. Lower attainers have not always made such good progress as other learners in the past, because of teaching methods and support that were not always appropriate for their needs.

In the sixth form, students show good attitudes to learning and respond well where activities are appropriately challenging and varied. Teachers are beginning to improve the motivation of those students in Year 12 who are finding academic work difficult. Students say they enjoy their lessons and they have good relationships with both staff and their peers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The great majority of students thoroughly enjoy their education because they are well served by a curriculum which encourages their personal development. There is good provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT. The virtual learning environment is well established. This allows students to work with a vast range of resources at any time, wherever they access the Web. The school's sports college status is having a significant impact on the opportunities for, and learning of, the students. The specialism is leading the way in establishing a learning programme tailored to individual needs and thinking skills in all areas of the curriculum. The new programmes of study in Year 7 have been successfully implemented and the students are showing a positive response to these.

A rich and varied programme of extra-curricular activities, particularly in physical education, enriches the curriculum for students of all ages, interests and abilities and this leads to high levels of motivation and the development of good teamwork. There is clear evidence that the Living for Sport and Lifestyle programmes have improved achievement for targeted learners. Courses in Key Stage 4 have been adapted to meet the needs of those looking for more vocational options and those at risk of disengagement with learning, but these have not yet had time to secure better achievement for all groups of learners. Collaboration with other schools provides a wide variety of courses and qualifications. Students, including those in the sixth form, speak very highly of the options open to them and for a few it has provided the offer of future employment. Independent learning assignments are used in subjects alongside, as well as instead of, traditional homework.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care and support contribute effectively to the students' personal development and well-being. Secure systems exist for the safeguarding of students and their health and safety. Appropriate risk assessments are carried out and the school provides a healthy and safe working environment. There are effective partnerships with other local agencies to ensure that pupils, including those at risk, receive the support they need. The school is successful in ensuring that all students, irrespective of their background or ability, feel valued and are supported. It successfully integrates students who have had difficulties at other schools. Transition and

induction arrangements for Year 7 students are good and this enables them to settle quickly into school. Guidance for students when choosing options at the end of Year 9 is good and the school works well with other agencies to ensure that Year 11 students receive good information and guidance on post-16 opportunities.

Where diagnostic and formative marking and assessment of students' work is strong, their progress is greatly supported. However, there are areas where this is inconsistent, especially in supporting the school's well-structured homework policy. Tracking and monitoring procedures are comprehensive and increasingly rigorous. However, they have yet to fully impact on the attainment and achievement of lower ability students. Students broadly know their target grades and receive timely and useful advice and guidance on how to achieve them. In addition to academic targets, attendance targets are set for all students and they are beginning to appreciate the link between good attendance and high achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Senior leaders and managers have successfully focused on developing a cohesive learning community at Devizes. Accurate identification of the school's strengths and areas for development has led to an excellent strategic plan, establishing clear short, medium and long-term goals. Outstanding leadership and management of the sports specialism have enabled it to drive school improvement and this can be clearly seen in the areas of the school's work which have progressed most rapidly. The full impact of the school's focus on raising standards and increasing rates of progress for all students, however, is yet to be realised, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. In the meantime, the school's good approach to setting challenging but realistic targets is making a significant contribution to raising students' aspirations and achievement.

Equality of opportunity is vigorously and successfully promoted and the school is welcoming, tolerant and inclusive. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good and leaders and managers have a clear understanding of what is needed to develop it further. Staff greatly value working at Devizes, and this reflects the school's commitment to ensuring high quality professional development through innovative initiatives such as the CPD-24 programme. This is significantly adding to the school's capacity to secure further, sustained improvement. Governors discharge their responsibilities well and ensure that school leaders are well supported and, increasingly, effectively challenged.

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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	2
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	1	2

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/or disabilities make progress	2	2

¹Grade 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

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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	

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

6 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Devizes School, Devizes SN10 3AG

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and meeting with you, and were impressed with the pride most of you have in your school.

- These are the main findings of the inspection:
- Devizes is a good and rapidly improving school.
- Most students are achieving well, although some of you could be making progress a little faster, especially in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- Teaching is generally good and in places is outstanding.
- You have a good curriculum, which the headteacher and the senior team are working hard to improve still further.
- Your personal development is good overall and in some areas, such as your awareness of healthy lifestyles, it is outstanding.
- Staff at the school care, guide and support you well so that you can be successful at school and also later in adult life.
- Your school is well led and managed, with very good plans for how it can get even better.
- The school's sports college status makes an outstanding contribution to your overall education.
- The headteacher agrees with the inspection team that you could achieve even higher standards, and we have asked that:
 - teachers in the sixth form and Key Stage 4 make better use of the information about what you have already achieved when planning lessons to make sure you make faster progress
 - the school fully implements the changes to the curriculum in Key Stage 4 so that all students make consistently good progress.

You can do your bit to help by ensuring that you always come to school when you can and on time and work hard in all of your lessons. A few of you could also behave a little better in lessons so that you achieve more and do not to disrupt the learning of others. On behalf of the inspection team, the very best of luck with your studies in the future.

Yours faithfully Ken Bush Lead inspector