

Somervale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109307
Local Authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	337270
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Mary Massey HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	550
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	83
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Clayden
Headteacher	Mr Peter Beaven
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2007
School address	Redfield Road Midsomer Norton Radstock BA3 2HG
Telephone number	01761 414276
Fax number	01761 410613
Email address	somervale_sec@bathnes.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 26 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, scrutinised documents including minutes of meetings and the school's development plan and looked at 334 student, 33 staff and 168 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether the barriers to progress in mathematics and science have been correctly identified and whether the school is doing enough to reduce them for all students including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- how well the school is using assessment data to secure improvement for all groups
- the effectiveness of the school's systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, identify priorities and plan for improvement, including providing training, and then evaluating the impact of actions taken
- the impact of the new federation and leadership arrangements.

Information about the school

Somervale is smaller than the average secondary school where the number of students has halved since 2002. In September 2009 the school was federated with Norton Hill School, the other much larger school in Midsomer Norton. The two schools now have one governing body and the headteacher from Norton Hill leads both schools. Since September there has been limited joint provision for students in Year 10. There has been some joint sixth form provision with Norton Hill School and Norton Radstock College for some years and more recently with Writhlington School, the third secondary school in the local area.

The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average, as is the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. About half of these students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is just over half the national average.

Foundation status was granted in February 2009. The school became a media arts specialist college in 2000 and was redesignated in 2006. It has the Investor in People award, Eco Schools silver award, Sportsmark, Artsmark and the Healthy School award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

In accordance with Section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures. The school also requires significant improvement in relation to its sixth form and levels of attendance.

Students describe the school as very friendly with good relationships between staff and students. They and their parents value its small size, which provides opportunities for a large proportion of students to be involved, for example, in school sports teams or productions. The atmosphere in school is very calm and students behave well in lessons. GCSE results have improved over the last three years and this improvement accelerated in 2009, so the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades is now close to the national average. Although rising, standards in mathematics at GCSE in 2009 remained low, as the result of a legacy of underachievement in earlier years. However, students in other year groups are now making much better progress, particularly in mathematics and science. Current data for Years 10 and 11 indicate that in 2010 and 2011 GCSE results will continue to rise rapidly to meet challenging targets. There is some good teaching in the school and in these lessons students are enthusiastic and enjoy themselves because they are actively involved in their own learning. Students work well together and are regularly engaged in assessing their own work. However, teachers' expectations of the standards that students can achieve are frequently not sufficiently ambitious and there is not enough focus on the quality of students' learning. Limited use of assessment data in teachers' planning means that work does not always match students' needs and teachers' questioning does not probe or extend students' understanding. The good practice within the federation is not yet widely shared, to enable all teachers to understand clearly what makes a lesson outstanding so that students can make the maximum progress.

The school provides a broad and well-balanced curriculum that meets students' needs. Since September the federation has provided increased opportunities for students in Year 10 who can now access a wider range of courses to match their aspirations and abilities. Changes to the curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 are already beginning to have a positive impact on students' progress.

Support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. Those that come to school regularly make good progress, but too many of these students have

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very low rates of attendance. Although overall attendance was below the national average last year, and the number of persistent absentees too high, there has been a significant improvement this term. An electronic system to monitor and analyse attendance data is currently being installed to tackle current shortcomings in procedures. Transition arrangements for pupils from primary schools into Year 7 and for making option choices in Year 9 are thorough and focused on individual needs. Although the vast majority of students are confident that they are safe, the school does not meet its statutory requirements for safeguarding and child protection. Some weaknesses in the safeguarding procedures were observed in the school.

Leadership arrangements in the sixth form are currently inadequate. Although outcomes are satisfactory, and students receive the advice they need, procedures for providing guidance and support for students are informal and rely on individual teachers rather than on a coordinated system.

In the short time that the federation headteacher and governing body have been in place, the impact of the improvements made over the last academic year has accelerated. The atmosphere is very positive amongst staff who are supportive of their new headteacher and enthusiastic for change. Priorities already having an impact on outcomes include a stronger focus on the role of middle managers, the role of tutors and increased curriculum provision within the federation for students in Year 10. Students report that behaviour has improved as a result of clearer management systems. Training for the new members of the leadership team has sharpened the quality of monitoring teaching so they are more aware of strengths and weaknesses in provision. Governors have taken fast and decisive action to plan for improvements to the building and manage the budget deficit. In classrooms, the rate of students' progress continues to improve as the school focuses more strongly on learning and raising attainment. This rapid improvement in most areas of the school's provision demonstrates the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation procedures and indicates a good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that by the end of the autumn term 2009:
 - statutory requirements for safeguarding and child protection are met
 - risk assessment procedures for school trips are applied consistently
 - a reliable system is put in place to record the attendance of sixth form students.
- Improve rates of attendance and reduce the number of persistent absentees.
- Strengthen leadership and management in the sixth form in order to improve students' achievement and well-being.
- Further raise attainment through improvements in the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - using assessment data consistently in planning lessons to ensure that the work

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provided is matched to individual students' needs

- setting higher expectations and being more ambitious for students in order to accelerate progress
- developing teachers' questioning skills to enhance students' understanding
- using the expertise within the federation to ensure that teachers understand what makes an outstanding lesson, enabling outstanding learning and progress for students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Although students' attainment over the three years from 2006 to 2008 was significantly below the national average, in 2009 GCSE results improved substantially as a result of early identification and intervention for underachieving students in Year 11. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades rose to close to the national average, and the performance of boys improved so they did better than girls. Although results in mathematics at GCSE are rising, they still remain below the national average, but the school is successfully tackling the legacy of underachievement across this and all subjects. The rate of students' progress right across the school has accelerated rapidly over the last year. Evidence from the school's current data and from inspectors' lesson observations shows that students are now making satisfactory progress, particularly in Years 7 to 9, and that GCSE results are likely to continue to improve to meet or exceed national benchmarks in 2010 and 2011. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are achieving in line with their peers. There are extensive opportunities for students to be involved in creative arts activities, but the impact of the school's media and arts specialism beyond English, media and music is more limited. English has been the strongest performing core subject over the last three years but the school missed its targets in music and media in 2009.

Students behave well around the school. Some of them expressed concerns about behaviour in lessons and inspectors believe that this is invariably linked to the quality of teaching. The vast majority of students say they feel safe in school, and that although there is some bullying occasionally, when they tell teachers it is dealt with effectively. Take up of school meals is good and the majority of students are enthusiastically involved in the wide range of extra-curricular sport available. In this small school the opportunity to be involved in representing the school in sport is genuinely open to everyone. The Junior Sports Leaders award allows students to contribute to the community by helping in local primary schools. The 'Brighter Futures' gardening project is enthusiastically supported with selling vegetables and plants to the local community. Through the media and arts specialism some students are involved in running a local community radio station. The extent to which students are developing their work-place skills is satisfactory. They are good at working in groups and have a sound understanding of issues such as managing money and sustainable development. Attendance, although currently low, is improving. Students' moral and social development is good. Students report that they enjoy religious education lessons that

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provide the opportunity for spiritual development and learning more about other religions and cultures. However, their understanding of their place in multicultural Britain is more limited.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching across the school is variable. Positive relationships in classrooms contribute to a calm atmosphere in lessons and students feel confident to ask for help when they need it. Independent work skills are well developed and students work very effectively in small groups, coaching and supporting one another. However, not all teachers use these student skills effectively and in some lessons they talk for too long and students do not have enough opportunity to be actively involved with their learning. Questioning frequently does not probe thinking or challenge students sufficiently. Assessment data are available for teachers but are not regularly used to plan lessons so that work is matched to students' individual needs. Many teachers encourage students to be involved in assessing their own work, which helps them understand their strengths and weaknesses. However, although most teachers mark work regularly, there is no

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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consistent system across the school. Sometimes, the standards expected are too low, and students are not all provided with helpful, constructive comments so they know how to improve.

Recent developments to the curriculum, and the new federation with Norton Hill School mean that the choice of courses for students in Year 10 has widened so many more were able to choose the options they wanted this academic year. Links with other local providers make three diplomas and other extensive vocational options available to students. The school takes great care to ensure that students are well informed before they make their choices at the end of Year 9. Students' enthusiasm for science and their much better achievement in it in Year 9 is reflected in the fact that over half of Year 10 has opted to study separate sciences in 2009. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities and a high take up by students, especially for sport. Creative arts provision is strong, with a regular two day arts festival, a wide range of options at Key Stage 3, and a local radio station set up by the school on the school site.

The pastoral care of students is good although the role of tutors is not fully developed. Vulnerable students are supported well and some make good progress as a result. There are shortcomings in monitoring attendance and analysing data, and safeguarding procedures are inadequate. Recent modifications to the policy for managing behaviour and higher expectations have resulted in an ensuing increase in exclusions, which are currently high. Students report that, as a result, behaviour has improved, especially in corridors and between lessons.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	4

How effective are leadership and management?

Improvements in provision that took place during the last academic year are already having a positive impact on outcomes for students. Under the leadership of a very experienced headteacher and chair of governors, transition into the new federation has taken place smoothly and the leadership team already knows the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. Leaders have undertaken a thorough analysis of the school's performance and are setting increasingly challenging targets. Expectations of both staff and students are high and current planning reflects this. Middle managers of core subjects have been brought onto the leadership team and are now securely involved in driving the school forward. Monitoring systems for all aspects of the school's work are in place but have yet to be fully embedded into performance management and

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professional development for individual staff. The growing strengths in leadership and management at different levels do not yet extend to the sixth form.

Local links for the school are strong and the new federation has the potential to strengthen these further, but the promotion of the international and national aspects of community cohesion, although developing, is more limited. Monitoring and analysis of the performance of different groups of students are thorough.

The new governing body has a wide range of skills and experience. It is very committed to the success of the federation and has made rapid progress in the first few weeks in beginning to tackle the budget deficit and make an audit to plan improvements to the buildings. There are, however, serious shortcomings in meeting statutory requirements for safeguarding in relation to the single central record, child protection training, and in systems for managing attendance and risk assessments.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	4
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The sixth form accepts students with a wide range of ability. The curriculum is good and is extended by partnerships with other post-16 providers in the local area that allow students to choose from a wide range of courses to meet their needs. Students are making satisfactory progress, although it is better at AS level than A level and achievement is not consistent across subjects. The few students taking applied courses are making good progress. Teaching is satisfactory overall with the best lessons involving students actively and encouraging independent learning. Students report that many teachers 'go the extra mile' to provide individual support both with their learning

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and in providing guidance for applying to higher education. Almost every student leaving the sixth form transfers to higher education or to employment.

Many students transfer between the federation schools during the day and they are conscientious about signing in and out so it is always clear where they are. However, systems for analysing and recording attendance are not sufficiently robust. The shortcomings in safeguarding arrangements for the main school also apply in the sixth form thereby rendering its overall effectiveness as inadequate. Students in Years 12 and 13 lack confidence in the sixth form leadership and are concerned that they are not regularly provided with systematic and well-informed guidance. This lack of clear direction and consistently reliable communication makes leadership inadequate.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	4
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	4

Views of parents and carers

Almost a third of parents returned our questionnaire and the very large majority were very supportive of the school. Several parents commented on how much they value the good relationship between staff and students and the very personal approach which means that problems are dealt with quickly, especially for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Others mentioned very effective transition from primary school in Year 7 that had helped students to settle in quickly. A small minority of parents of students in Years 12 and 13 expressed concerns about the quality of leadership and management in the sixth form.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Somervale School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 168 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection of which 139 were analysed. The 29 questionnaires received after the analysis had been carried out reflected the balance of views set out below. In total, there are 550 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	51	37	81	58	5	4	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	63	45	69	50	1	1	2	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	60	43	73	53	3	2	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	54	39	80	58	3	2	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	40	29	92	66	4	3	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	37	27	87	27	8	6	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	42	90	65	8	6	21	36
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	26	26	91	65	5	4	2	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	43	31	85	31	5	4	0	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	30	22	88	63	11	8	5	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	27	85	61	9	6	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	36	26	88	63	8	6	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	60	43	71	51	5	4	2	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Somervale School, Midsomer Norton BA3 2HG

I would like to thank you for the way in which you welcomed the team of inspectors to Somervale recently. We found you very keen to tell us about the good features of your school and those areas that could be improved. It was very helpful to hear your views and it helped us to reach our judgements. This letter is to inform you of our findings.

As a result of our inspection, we have given your school a notice to improve. This means that inspectors will visit the school soon to check on progress.

Somervale is a small school and a very friendly one, where many of you are involved in a wide range of activities. We found that GCSE results are rising, although standards are too low in mathematics. Overall, you are making satisfactory progress and many students in the lower year groups are making good progress. We believe that you would achieve more if the quality of teaching improved. Although you told us that you feel safe, and your parents agree that the school is a safe place, the governors must make sure that all the legal requirements for looking after children in schools are in place. This can be done very quickly. Attendance rates, although they have improved this term, are below what we expect. You can all do your part here, by making sure that you come to school regularly. There is a very clear link between your attendance and the results you achieve. The school also needs to improve the quality of leadership in the sixth form. Although students are getting the guidance they need, the systems are not sufficiently coordinated or thorough.

Some of you, for example students in Year 10 who have been able to have a wider range of option choices this year, are already aware of the positive impact of your federation with Norton Hill. You should feel confident that the headteacher, senior leaders and governors are working very hard to make sure that your school retains its special character but quickly feels the benefits of being part of a larger federation.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey

Her Majesty's Inspector

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