

Test Valley School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116426
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	338816
Inspection dates	1–2 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Tony Shield

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	780
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr B Burton
Headteacher	Miss L Hiscock
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 36 lessons, and held meetings with governors, members of staff and students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school documentation, including the self-evaluation form, safeguarding and other policy documents, the school improvement plan and records of students' progress. They analysed 221 parent questionnaire responses, and also took into account the views of students and staff expressed in questionnaires.

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

- the extent to which students of all abilities, and especially more-able girls, make good progress
- the extent to which teaching and the curriculum challenge and meet the needs of all students, including the most able
- the impact of new management procedures in ensuring realistic self-evaluation and in driving school improvement
- which aspects of the school provision or outcomes might be considered particular strengths.

Information about the school

Test Valley is smaller than most secondary schools and draws its students from a wide area. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is a little below average. Most of these students have specific learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional or social problems. Most students are of White British origin although there are a small number of students from a range of other ethnic heritages. The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing. A new headteacher took up post in September 2009.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Test Valley is a good school making confident strides forward. The new headteacher is building on its many strengths while creating fresh impetus for change. Well supported by her senior team, she has introduced a number of measures designed to adopt a systematic approach to monitoring the school's work. Her vision to bring out the best in all students has inspired a determination among all staff to bring this about. The impact of these initiatives is already evident in the improving quality of teaching and more rigorous approach to target-setting and improvement-planning. Performance in GCSE examinations in 2009 maintained the high standards of previous years, particularly in mathematics. However, the performance of more-able girls remains an issue, and the proportion of students reaching the highest grades could be better. Pupil attitudes and their enjoyment of school are very positive and make a strong contribution to their good achievement.

The school's existing strengths, particularly the outstanding care, guidance and support given to students, have also improved. The school's small size ensures all students are known well to staff and are part of an extended family in which everyone looks out for each other. Most parents are happy overall with their child's experience at the school, and at the heart of this is their confidence in the school to keep their child safe. Vulnerable students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are especially well looked after.

Parents are strongly supportive of the school. Typical of comments received by inspectors were: 'a great school ' our kids are challenged to be effective members of the school and community'. Students are community-minded and are enthusiastic in their response to opportunities to contribute, whether as members of the student council, peer mentors or prefects. The school's status as a mathematics and computing school is helping to promote good links both with local primary schools and the wider community. The school's good curriculum is enhanced through its links across the local consortium of schools, and external links such as those with a local organic farm, as part of the school's rural dimension.

The quality of teaching is improving as teachers' ambitions for their students are raised. Assessment data is used to track the progress of students well and set challenging targets. Good teaching enables students to aim high and make good progress through planning tasks well matched to their individual abilities. However, students do not make consistently good progress across all subjects, and there is more to be done to ensure that good practice is shared more widely and that teachers plan work to extend students' thinking, particularly the more able. Feedback is not always as helpful as it might be and some students lack confidence in their ability to work and solve problems

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on their own, and to discuss how well they are doing and how they might improve. Homework is not always used effectively as a way of developing students' skills in working independently of the teacher. Self-evaluation is guided by a thorough analysis of performance data and there are well-considered plans for further improvement. There is, among the whole staff, a professional approach to improving their teaching. A number of initiatives are relatively recent and it is too soon to measure their impact. Nevertheless, the school's track record of improvement and its ambitious yet realistic plans for further development indicate that the school has a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all students, especially the more-able girls, make more consistently good progress, and improve the proportion of students achieving A* and A grades at GCSE examinations by:
 - making sharper use of information on how well students are doing to plan tasks which extend students' thinking and challenge them to achieve their full potential
 - developing the students' confidence and ability to think for themselves and solve problems without asking the teacher
 - ensuring feedback, including marking, on how well students are doing enables them to know how to improve their work and move on to the next step in their learning
 - developing the use of homework to exploit opportunities to improve students' capacity to work on their own
 - sharing existing good practice more widely.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students are keen to do their best and apply themselves diligently to tasks set in lessons. In response to a questionnaire, most students said they enjoy school. They respond enthusiastically to the teaching, and cooperate well with teachers and with each other in class and group discussions.

Overall attainment is significantly above average. Given the broadly average attainment of students on entry in Year 7, this represents good progress through the school. Students do consistently well in mathematics, one of the school's specialist subjects, while their attainment in the other, information and communication technology, has been improving sharply in recent years. Results in English and science, while not as good as mathematics, have nevertheless also been improving. However, the proportion of students achieving A* and A grades is lower than might be expected given the achievements of students generally. The success of boys in mathematics rubs off onto their achievement in other subjects, while some more-able girls fail to match the progress of the boys. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make

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good progress, and are well supported in the classroom.

Responsible and thoughtful behaviour in class and around the school makes a significant contribution to students' success in their learning. It means they cooperate willingly with each other in pairs and groups, learning from each other as well as their teachers. They listen carefully and contribute answers generously. Students say that bullying is rare and as one pupil said: 'I feel safe as I know that if I was bullied, I would have a lot of help from teachers to get me through the situation.' Students have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, and a number were critical of what they considered unhealthy food in the canteen. They get involved enthusiastically in physical activities and school sports teams. The school actively promotes enterprise skills through such activities as 'Plastic Fantastic', a fashion show in which students took responsibility for writing the business plan and organising the event. Alongside their well developed teamwork skills, this ensures students are developing workplace skills and are well prepared for their futures beyond school. Attendance is average, although the school has good systems to monitor and raise overall figures.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

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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Students' good progress is the result of good teaching which interests and involves the students. Some teaching is inspirational, as in a Year 11 English lesson, when students, working in groups, developed cogent arguments in preparation for their oral examination. The teacher's light touch but probing interventions had a defining impact on the students' learning. Students were encouraged to offer constructive feedback to one another, something they did with skill and sensitivity. However, not all teaching offers such good opportunities for students to get involved. Nor is it always finely tuned to the needs and ability levels of all students in the class. More-able students in particular suffer when they are not given additional work which stretches them and makes them think more deeply for themselves. Opportunities to work in groups and share and discuss ideas together are enthusiastically adopted by students.

The curriculum is well planned to match students' interests and aptitudes, and also reflect the school's mathematics and computing status, for example in offering GCSE statistics to all students. The rural dimension is well supported through the provision of an environmental science course. Good partnerships with local schools and colleges ensure that a wider range of vocational and diploma courses are available for some students. The introduction of the Year 7 Toolkit, a 'learning to learn' course, in which students are provided with essential skills for learning, has proved effective. A wide-ranging and popular programme of enrichment activities, particularly in sport, drama and music, offers students excellent opportunities for developing their personal and social skills.

Students benefit from the school's culture of care and its outstanding procedures for guidance and support. A comprehensive range of policies and robust procedures for ensuring students' safety and well-being are in place. These are monitored by senior staff and governors to assure their effectiveness. Close links with external agencies support a number of vulnerable students. The work of the school counsellor in supporting students in need is especially valued by students. The work of the pastoral teams is effective in ensuring all students are well known and have someone to turn to for advice and support.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's clearly articulated vision for improvement is shared widely and a range of strategies designed to drive up standards even further is in place. There is a

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strong momentum for change and the newly introduced monitoring calendar is providing a good framework for self-evaluation, ensuring that leaders at all levels are part of the process. The performance of all students is assiduously tracked and underpins the school's drive to narrow the gap between the progress made by boys and girls, and promote equality and tackle discrimination. The school's strong commitment to inclusion helps ensure that all students feel valued and included. Governors are exceptionally well led by the chair of governors. They are ambitious, demonstrate a good knowledge of the school, and are confident in their capacity to both support and challenge the senior team.

The school has developed a good partnership with parents and information and consultation evenings are well attended by parents. The website is increasingly being used to keep in touch and allows parents to find out what their children are learning. A good range of partnerships with other schools, local business and agencies enables students to benefit from a wider breadth of opportunities than might otherwise be the case. The school takes its responsibility to ensure the safeguarding of students very seriously, and at the time of the inspection all safeguarding policies were in place. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. The school has a good understanding of its local context, but its approach to reaching out to a national and global dimension is less well developed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Responses were received from 221 parents and carers. Those responding were

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overwhelmingly positive about the school. While a few individual parents indicated some concerns or had negative comments about some aspect of the school's work, these were not widely shared. Parental comments especially commended the high levels of care and concern for students' well-being, and the community spirit engendered by the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Test Valley 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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 221 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 780 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	69	31	129	58	12	5	5	2
The school keeps my child safe	65	29	148	67	5	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	46	21	136	62	21	10	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	54	24	138	62	16	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	45	20	148	67	6	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	14	132	60	40	18	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	30	14	151	68	27	12	0	0
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)	46	21	144	65	9	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	51	23	144	65	10	5	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	41	19	130	59	26	12	6	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	14	141	64	21	10	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	46	21	152	69	5	2	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	70	32	135	61	8	4	1	0

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.



8 December 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Test Valley School, Stockbridge, Hampshire, SO20 6HA

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave us when we recently visited your school. Your school is providing you with a good education and continues to get better. These are the main elements in our report.

- You clearly enjoy school ' over 95% said so in your response to our questionnaire. GCSE results have been consistently well above average in recent years, evidence of your wish to do your best in examinations. These positive attitudes are a strong contributory factor in your good progress.
- Teaching is good and some of it is inspirational. However, sometimes work set does not meet your personal needs and challenge you to work hard enough.
- Staff take considerable care to ensure that you are exceptionally well looked after and supported through school.
- You develop good personal and social skills, which help prepare you for your future beyond school.
- The new headteacher has been successful in helping to make the school better, and is well supported by the senior team and other teachers.

We have asked the teachers to share good practice across the school. They should consider how all of you, including the more-able girls, can achieve even higher standards, by making sure that they use information about how well you are progressing to set you work which challenges you to think more deeply. They also need to ensure that you are given feedback, including marking, on how to improve your work. We think the school can develop your ability to work on your own more, and take fuller advantage of homework.

Thank you once again for your help during our visit. Good luck with your work in the future!

Yours sincerely

Tony Shield

Lead Inspector

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