

Somervale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109307
Local Authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	356520
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Christopher Russell HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
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	511
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	65
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Clayden
Headteacher	Peter Beaven
Date of previous school inspection	11 November 2009
School address	Redfield Road Midsomer Norton Radstock BA3 2HG
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Thirty-four lessons were observed, taught by 30 teachers; there were also a number of briefer visits to lessons. Meetings were held with students, staff and governors. Inspectors observed the schools work, and looked at a wide range of documentation, 102 questionnaires completed by parents, and questionnaires completed by staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the schools work. It looked in detail at five key areas.

How much progress different groups of students make.

Whether teaching is now consistently good and whether the weaknesses in teaching identified in the last inspection report have been remedied.

Whether the curriculum fully meets the needs of all groups of students.

Whether there have been improvements in sixth form leadership and whether the sixth form is now securely satisfactory.

The role that leaders across the school play in Somervales development and improvement.

Information about the school

Somervale is a small school; student numbers have fallen in recent years. The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is close to the national average. The school has a specialism in media arts. It holds a number of other awards, including Healthy School status and the Eco-schools award.

In September 2009, the school became part of a federation with Norton Hill, a local secondary school judged to be outstanding at its last inspection. The former headteacher of Norton Hill (a National Leader in Education) became the head of both schools and a new joint governing body was constituted. When Somervale was inspected in November 2009, it was judged to require significant improvement because it was performing less well than in all the circumstances it could be expected to perform; it was therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement was required in relation to safeguarding, attendance and the leadership and management of the sixth form. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors carried out a monitoring visit in March 2010. He judged that the school was making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising achievement. In October 2010, Somervale (with its federated partner school) became one of the first new-style academies.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Somervale School is improving rapidly. Decisive and determined action has been taken to deal with the areas of weakness identified a year ago. There have also been a wide range of other improvements, and students achievement, although satisfactory, is rising quickly. Much has changed in the past year; senior leaders have a clear understanding of what has been achieved and what remains to be done, and the school is in a strong position to continue its rapid improvement. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majestys Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The three particular weaknesses identified a year ago have all been rectified: procedures for safeguarding students have been strengthened and are good; attendance has risen steeply and is now above average; and sixth form leadership is now much more secure. Teaching has also improved significantly. It is satisfactory overall, with some variability across the school, but a much greater proportion of teaching is now good or outstanding. The curriculum, supported by the schools links with its partner school and a number of other local schools and colleges, gives students access to a good range of courses and opportunities.

This is a calm, happy and friendly school. The students understand and appreciate the benefits that being part of a small school community bring. They feel very well known by staff and well cared for and supported. A particular strength of the schools work is the way in which students contribute to the life of the school and local community. The range of opportunities is excellent, particularly given the schools size, and large numbers of students are involved.

The schools rapid improvement is largely due to the headteachers intelligent and determined leadership. He has successfully undertaken considerable and fundamental change while securing and maintaining very good staff morale a significant achievement. Somervales highly successful partnership with Norton Hill School has been instrumental in its improvement. Arrangements have been thoughtfully and sensitively handled to ensure that partnership work is sharply focused on improvement and very well received by staff. The governing body has also played an invaluable role in the schools improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce the remaining variability in teaching by ensuring that:
 - all lessons provide sufficient challenge for everyone
 - lessons provide greater opportunity for students to work more independently for extended periods of time and to take the lead in their learning

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- students always have a clear understanding of what they are expected to know, understand or be able to do by the end of each lesson
- lessons are structured to give students opportunities to undertake short tasks which demonstrate how they have secured their learning within the lesson.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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

Students overall achievement is satisfactory and rising quickly. Attainment has improved, particularly students attainment of five or more higher grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. Students currently make satisfactory progress from their starting points in Year 7 to reach average levels of attainment at the end of Year 11, but increasing numbers of students are now making good progress.

Variation in students achievement across different curriculum subjects reduced significantly in the 2010 GCSE examination results. There is still some variability between the achievement of different groups of students; in particular, boys achieved more than girls in the 2009 GCSE examination results, but in 2010 the situation reversed. However, this variation is reducing quickly and patterns of achievement are becoming more consistent. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to other students.

Students have good attitudes to learning. They are enthusiastic about school and learning. They collaborate well together and enjoy working more independently when the lesson allows. Most speak confidently, although some are more reticent.

Students behave well in lessons and around the site. They say that they feel safe and that the small amount of bullying is dealt with effectively. The way in which students make a positive contribution to the life of the school and wider community is a considerable strength. A very large proportion of students are involved. Opportunities are very wide and include over a third of students trained and working as sports leaders, work in the schools successful market garden and many students involvement with Somervales radio station.

The schools specialist status makes a significant contribution to students achievement and their wider outcomes.

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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	3
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	1
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall, but now good and outstanding in many lessons; inadequate teaching is rare. Lessons are characterised by a very calm classroom environment, with productive and positive relationships between teachers and students. Marking has improved and students now typically have a much clearer idea about their targets and what they need to do to reach them; in some cases, advice is very precise and helpful.

Teaching that is no better than satisfactory commonly has one or more of the following features:

a lack of challenge for students, with lessons sometimes repeating work that students can already do

over-direction by the teacher, with insufficient opportunities for students to work independently for more extended periods of time or to take more of a lead in the lesson

a lack of clarity and precision with students about the lessons aims and what the teacher is hoping students will be able to know, understand or do by the end of the lesson

planning that does not structure the lesson and its activities in a way that enables teachers to check students learning as the lesson proceeds.

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Good arrangements for care, guidance and support make a strong contribution to students wider outcomes. There have, for example, been significant improvements in attendance and behaviour as a result of much-improved systems and processes. Clearly targeted support is provided for potentially vulnerable students. Good systems are in place to help students make well-informed choices about their futures.

Leaders have worked hard to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of different groups of students well. Curriculum opportunities include a successful vocational qualification in horticulture linked to the schools market garden, and opportunities for students take one or more diplomas. There are useful opportunities for students to take examinations early and retake to improve their grades. Good use has been made of partnerships with other providers to allow students access to courses and options elsewhere. Enrichment opportunities are a strength, especially for such a small school, and include a wide range of clubs and after-school activities.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides the school with high quality leadership; he is very well supported by other members of the senior team. Senior leaders understanding of the quality of provision and the strengths and weaknesses in teaching is based on a good range of monitoring activities. A range of effective actions have been taken to develop the roles and responsibilities of the schools middle leaders. This group of leaders is taking an increasing role in the schools development, although there is variability, for example, in the depth of analysis of departmental strengths and weaknesses and plans for improvement. Many middle leaders were new in post in September 2010.

Governors provide excellent challenge and support; they played an invaluable role in ensuring that the federation of the two schools was successful and in supporting a smooth transition to academy status.

The way in which the school safeguards its students has improved considerably. It is now thorough and meets government requirements well. The recording of checks carried out on staff, risk assessments for school trips and the recording of sixth form attendance were problems a year ago; all are now robust. A high standard has been set for staff in this area.

A wide range of effective provision is in place to promote community cohesion. There are particularly strong connections with the local community. Some good work has been done

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to improve students understanding of national and global diversity, although this is not as strong.

Leaders have good regard to the need to promote equality. Leaders track the achievement of different groups carefully and take determined action to reduce any variation. As a result, patterns of achievement are becoming more consistent.

Partnership work is excellent. The school works closely with a number of other schools and colleges in the local area, a range of agencies and a large number of community partners. Most notably, there are very effective links with Norton Hill School, and staff across the school work closely with their colleagues at the partner school. This is helping to support rapid improvement and is helping Somervale, as a small school, to offer additional curricular opportunities to its students.

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	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The leadership and management of the sixth form are now secure. Students feel that provision is improving and that the sixth forms direction is now clear. Appropriate systems are in place to monitor provision and outcomes, and action is being taken to deal with any weaknesses; for example, there were differences between students predicted and actual results last year, so assessment processes are now being tightened. The new sixth form leader only took up post in September 2010 but already has a clear vision for the sixth forms future development. It is, however, too early to see the full impact of the new leadership arrangements.

As in the rest of the school, the quality of teaching is improving, although there is still variability. Students are well supported and given useful individual support and advice concerning their future options, although some expressed concerns that the university

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application process has been a little slow. Strong partnership work supports the curriculum well; many students benefit from being able to follow courses at Norton Hill or at other schools and colleges.

Students make satisfactory progress in the sixth form. Examination results are broadly in line with national averages. Students achievement varies between subjects, but leaders are taking decisive action to improve achievement in lower-performing subjects. Students have good opportunities to develop their enterprise skills, although opportunities to take up healthy exercise in school are rather limited

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
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	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers responded positively to the questionnaire. A particularly large proportion of those who responded feel that their children enjoy school. There were few written comments; there was a mixture of positive and negative comments, but no pattern to the small number of negative comments that were made.

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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 102 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 511 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	37	60	59	4	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	32	31	64	63	6	6	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	27	26	68	67	7	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	29	65	64	5	5	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	26	25	70	69	4	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	22	69	68	7	7	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	19	73	79	9	9	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)	34	33	60	59	6	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	31	30	62	61	7	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	26	61	60	10	10	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	23	69	68	5	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	24	24	69	68	5	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	40	39	57	56	5	5	0	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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupils' 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.



26 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Somervale School, Midsomer Norton BA3 2HG

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. I am writing to you to tell you about our main findings.

When the school was inspected a year ago, it had a number of strengths, but also some important weaknesses. The school was therefore given a notice to improve. We found that the school has improved enormously in the past year. The particular weaknesses seen last time in some of the schools processes for keeping you safe, your attendance and in the sixth form have improved a lot.

Staff look after you well. This helps almost all of you to feel very safe and happy in school. You behave well around the school and in lessons. Teaching has improved a lot in the past year. It is still satisfactory overall, but much more is now good and outstanding. The most important thing for the school now is to ensure that all teaching is at least good. The schools partnership with Norton Hill is extremely useful. Teachers from the two schools are working closely together and an increasing number of students are able to follow courses at the partner school.

The headteacher and his colleagues have achieved much in the past year. They have a good understanding of the schools strengths and areas for development, and know what to do next to continue the schools rapid improvement.

Yours sincerely

Chris Russell

Her Majestys Inspector

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