

Devizes School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	126506
Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	381245
Inspection dates	22–23 February 2012
Lead inspector	Karl Sampson HMI

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1008
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	173
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Matthew Bywater
Headteacher	Malcom Irons
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 December 2008
School address	The Green Devizes Wiltshire SN10 3AG
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Karl Sampson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jill Arnold	Additional inspector
Marion Hobbs	Additional inspector
Helen Matthews	Additional inspector
Joe Skivington	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors carried out observations of 3 full lessons, and 29 part lessons taught by 32 teachers. Ten of the lessons were jointly observed by a member of the school's leadership team. One inspector undertook a learning walk which comprised a number of short visits to lessons to look at provision for lower-ability students and those with special educational needs. Inspectors also made short visits to 14 lessons to look at the quality of marking and the progress of students eligible for free school meals. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, governors and different groups of students. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning documents, external evaluations of the school's work, policy documents and students' work. They analysed 318 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, questionnaires completed by a sample of students from each year group and 68 completed by staff.

Information about the school

Devizes School is larger than most secondary schools. The school has held sports specialist status since 2004. Most students are of White British heritage and almost all speak English as their first language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below that found nationally. The proportion of students supported by school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below the national average. The school holds the Gold Youth Sports Trust Partner award and is also in receipt of the Healthy Schools Plus award. The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school with a good sixth form that is determined to keep improving and make sure that all students achieve as well as they can. A commitment to inclusiveness and good citizenship shapes planning and provision. The development of a curriculum which has an academic core, complemented by vocational pathways, enables all students to achieve in ways appropriate to their individual strengths and interests.
- Leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, know the school well. A rigorous programme of performance management and professional development opportunities is successfully reducing the variation that remains across subjects. Consequently, students' achievement is good and improving over time. From below average overall starting points, students make good progress, catching up with their peers nationally so that their attainment is at least in line with national averages by the end of Year 11.
- Teaching is mainly good, with some that is outstanding. The strongest teaching is found in English, the humanities, design and technology and physical education. Teaching is currently weaker in mathematics, but current actions undertaken by the school are beginning to address this successfully.
- Students have positive attitudes to their learning, are keen to succeed and their behaviour in lessons and around the school is good overall. The sports specialism is integral to the school's success and supports the curriculum in effectively promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school is not outstanding because students in mathematics do not make the progress they should given their starting points. Leaders and managers recognise that for teaching to be outstanding it has to secure consistently good or better progress in all subjects. The school accepts the view of a small minority of parents who believe that its work would be enhanced if it responded consistently well to all correspondence.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the overall quality of teaching, especially in mathematics, to achieve

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greater consistency of good or outstanding practice by:

- using assessment data to ensure that learning activities are closely tailored to meet individual needs and stretch and challenge all students
 - using questioning and dialogue to deepen understanding, extend thinking and provide opportunities for students to shape lines of enquiry
 - ensuring that all marking provides students with precise subject-specific guidance on how to improve and that students are given routine opportunities to respond.
- Develop students' numeracy skills more systematically in all subjects.
 - Improve communication so that it is more regular between parents and the school to ensure that all correspondence is followed up in a timely manner.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students make good progress in lessons, particularly during practical tasks and when given opportunities to discuss their work, steer learning and direct lines of enquiry. This underpins their good progress in verbal communication, and their literacy skills are being enhanced by the success of the school's work to develop the quality of writing. The work of the English department and its use of English 'buddies' with other subjects are embedding this good practice across the curriculum. Students work well together in pairs and groups and use new technologies purposefully to support their learning, particularly through the school's online virtual learning environment (VLE). However, school leaders recognise that the development of mathematical skills is a weaker aspect of students' development and too many opportunities to develop numeracy skills are missed in subjects across the curriculum.

In the main school, students make good progress over time. Examination results have improved well, especially in English. Weaker performance in mathematics has been tackled robustly by senior leaders. Consequently, the rate of progress is accelerating, attainment is improving and results are on track to move into line with the national average. Overall attainment is average and improving by the end of Year 11, with GCSE results in line with those nationally. However, the school's performance in five of its GCSE subjects including English, and the specialist subject of physical education, along with results in BTEC vocational qualifications, was above the national average in 2011. The gains are more marked in English and the humanities because students have more systematic opportunities to develop their literacy skills across the curriculum. High-ability students achieve well overall, making good progress against their starting points in most subjects apart from in mathematics and languages where their progress is in line with that found nationally. The very large majority of parents and carers are pleased with the progress made by their children. Inspection evidence, including from lesson observations, current assessment information and the school's appraisals of teaching, confirms the accuracy of this view.

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The curriculum and teaching are focused precisely on students' emerging needs and revised accordingly. For example, lower-ability students at Key Stage 4 who have traditionally underachieved are making better-than-expected progress because the curriculum has been broadened to include courses that are tailored to their needs and interests. Students told inspectors how much they appreciated the range of courses now in place in English and in science. The school provides good support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and these students make the same good progress as their peers. The progress of students known to be eligible for free school meals is accelerating and is rapidly closing the gap in attainment compared to that found nationally.

Improvements in achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 are also being matched in the sixth form. Strong leadership by sixth form leaders has been an important factor in strengthening systems for monitoring student and subject performance. Learning and progress are good, and improving, with significant strengths in the achievement of students on applied courses. Attainment is rising overall but some variation remains. A more appropriate blend of A-level and vocational courses is meeting the needs of all learners and supporting students in their transition from Year 11. Consequently, retention rates have improved and AS- and A-level performance was significantly stronger in 2011 than in previous years. The school is presently focused on teaching strategies to raise achievement further, including the sharper use of assessment data to ensure that sufficient challenge is provided for all students.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good overall, including in the sixth form. Although responses from students and their parents and carers reflect this, some students report that there is some variation, and a few teachers are not as consistent in the way they give feedback or manage behaviour. However, the strengths of teaching outweigh any relative weaknesses. Many lessons feature motivated and industrious students who make good progress as a result of authoritative, skilful and dynamic teaching, underpinned by positive relationships and behaviour within a supportive learning environment. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects are taught effectively across the curriculum. Inspectors saw evidence of well-structured group work and good opportunities for students to debate ethical dilemmas.

The best lessons are focused sharply on learning and driven by clear, explicit and shared objectives. In such lessons, learning moves along briskly, questions are probing and tasks are creative and challenging. As a result, students' interest is captured and the students articulate ideas fluently and with confidence, regardless of ability. For example, a science lesson saw Year 11 students empowered by the teacher to take command of their own learning and confidently articulate aspects of collision theory and activation energy whilst exploring the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Learning is strongest where teachers use learning activities to identify gaps in knowledge and then address any misconceptions through high-quality questioning, precise feedback, greater challenge

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and frequent opportunities for students to shape lines of enquiry. A Year 13 history lesson saw pupils engaged in a precise evaluation of the key features of analytical and discursive writing through the annotation of three different examples. Crucially, the resulting discussion enabled students to identify, exemplify and then apply the key features to refine their own writing. However, these skills are not yet apparent in all teaching.

Evidence gathered from a review of some of the students' exercise books across a range of subjects showed that students' work is usually marked frequently and usually offers good pointers for improvement. Exemplary use of assessment was seen in a Year 7 English lesson where students confidently used assessment criteria to engage in a dialogue of assessment with their peers and the teacher. As a result they made excellent progress and could clearly identify how to move their own learning forward in relation to their overall targets and 'mini-milestones'. This was not always the case, for example in mathematics where too often teachers opted for encouraging, but general, comments rather than providing precise specific subject guidance to help students take the next steps in learning. Where students are not expected to respond routinely to written feedback its impact on progress is diminished.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students say that they feel very safe and their parents and carers strongly agree. The introduction of mixed-age tutor groups fosters harmonious social relationships between all members of the school community regardless of age, ability or background. Effective steps are taken to ensure that students understand their role in tackling prejudice and bullying of all kinds and they are confident that problems will be resolved quickly. Through curriculum programmes such as those for personal, social and health education, together with ethics, students develop a good awareness of how to behave toward each other and of right and wrong. The work of the ethics team to examine issues such as homophobia and cultural identity and their impact in British society today is supporting students well in challenging prejudice.

Students have a clear understanding of the school rules, sanctions and rewards. In the most engaging lessons, behaviour was outstanding. The large majority of parents, carers and students agree that standards of behaviour are good. However, a minority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaires, and some students who spoke to inspectors, said that there are occasions when learning in lessons can be disrupted by others. The team investigated this in great depth with staff and students. The school's expectations for behaviour are consistent and applied evenly by most staff. The very great majority of students respond well and engage readily in learning so that lessons proceed with minimal interruption. Any unacceptable behaviour is dealt with effectively and students who have difficulty in behaving properly receive a good range of well-managed individual support. The creation of more appropriate personalised curriculum pathways has been central to this improvement.

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Pastoral assistants and the school's Parent Support Adviser are valuable aspects of provision and work together effectively to ensure that students receive clear and consistent support. The school has made excellent use of expertise within the governing body to develop a successful approach to managing any conflict through restorative justice. A scrutiny of the school's behavioural records demonstrates that behaviour has improved over time with a reduction in exclusions and recorded instances of negative behaviour, including racist incidents and bullying. Attendance has improved to be just above the national average, and is rising.

Leadership and management

Since the last inspection, the headteacher, governors, subject and sixth form leaders have focused successfully on raising achievement and improving the curriculum. Consequently, the school's capacity to improve is good. All leaders are held tightly accountable for students' achievement and 'appreciative and developmental' reviews provide a good balance of support and challenge. Ensuring equality of opportunity for all students is a high priority and school leaders do not tolerate discrimination. Systems for monitoring the performance of students and subjects have been significantly strengthened and assessment information is being used assiduously to identify and address quickly any underperformance. Strategic and departmental planning is closely aligned and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching have led to well-targeted professional development for individual staff and across the school. Mini action research projects and practitioner 'learning communities' are being used effectively to drive further improvements in teaching and learning.

The curriculum has been carefully reviewed and refined to meet students' needs, raise achievement and support progression beyond Year 11. There is a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities that deepens and broadens students' experience and makes a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The sports specialism has made a significant contribution to providing opportunities for students to develop a range of skills through the medium of sport. For example, pupils are developing their writing and creative skills through sports journalism projects as well as developing themselves against the Olympic values and honing their leadership skills in local communities and further afield.

The governing body holds the school to account effectively and, in collaboration with senior leaders, makes effective arrangements to ensure students' safety. Leaders and managers are challenged robustly about students' achievement. The views of parents are sought through questionnaires and concerns can be raised at any time through the school's website. However, in their responses to inspection questionnaires, a small minority of parents felt that communication with the school could be improved. Their main concerns centred on the efficiency of response to correspondence as well as requesting ways in which the school could communicate more effectively and support learners where access to the internet is limited or not available at all.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.

24 February 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Devizes School, Devizes SN10 3AG

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the members of the inspection team when we visited your school recently. Particular thanks to those of you who gave up your time to speak with us and those of you who completed the questionnaire. We judged the school to be good. Everyone has worked really hard since the previous inspection to improve your achievement. Good leadership and management are bringing about sustained improvements in many aspects of the school's work. The headteacher and the leadership team set high standards and they are well supported by the other staff and governors. They are all determined that you should have the opportunity to succeed, and their work enables you to achieve well.

The school's ethos and culture of high expectation and aspiration provide you with a good platform for learning and help you to prepare successfully for life beyond school. You told us you feel safe and your behaviour in and around the school is good. It is underpinned by good relationships throughout the school as shown by your positive attitudes to learning in lessons. You make good academic progress over your time at the school and enjoy your education because overall you are well taught. You appreciate the benefits that the sports specialism provides, particularly the range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities available to you. The curriculum plays a good role in your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which complements your good academic and personal development.

We have asked leaders and managers to continue raising attainment and ensure that teaching continues to improve by:

- designing learning activities that identify gaps in knowledge and extend thinking through high-quality questioning, precise feedback, greater challenge and frequent opportunities for students to shape lines of enquiry
- developing students' numeracy skills more systematically in all subjects
- improving communication so that it is more regular between parents and the school to ensure that all correspondence is followed up in a timely manner.

You can all certainly help your teachers by responding to their comments and using the feedback that they give so you improve your learning and the quality of your work.

Yours sincerely

Karl Sampson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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