

Sidmouth College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	113503
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	378719
Inspection dates	1–2 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	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	852
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	122
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gary Neal
Principal	Jeremy Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	19–20 May 2009
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

Karl Sampson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Sanderson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ian Bryant	Additional inspector
Svetlana Bajic-Raymond	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors carried out observations of two full lessons, and 32 part lessons taught by 34 teachers. Eight 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. 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 199 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, questionnaires completed by a sample of students from each year group and 41 completed by staff.

Information about the school

Sidmouth College is smaller than most secondary schools. 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 half that found nationally. The proportion of students supported by school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is almost double the national average. The school holds technology specialist status and is also designated as having a specialist rural dimension. The school holds the Investors in Careers 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 and improving school. The principal and his team have been successful in establishing a culture and ethos that is increasingly one of high expectation and aspiration through striving for excellence.
- Students achieve well, making good progress at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 to secure good academic outcomes, regardless of ability, starting point or special educational needs.
- Behaviour is good, attitudes to learning are positive and pupils exhibit confidence and respect for others, as evidenced by good relationships throughout the school. Pupils say that they feel very safe and their parents and carers agree.
- Leaders and managers are bringing about sustained improvement in many aspects of the school's work. There is a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration among staff and a commitment to improving achievement for all.
- Teaching is good overall and inspectors observed some examples of outstanding practice. Greater consistency in the practice of individual teachers over time and a stronger overall quality are required to move good teaching and learning towards outstanding.
- Leaders have successfully focused on raising the quality of teaching. Targeted professional development, the introduction of a programme to improve literacy skills across the curriculum and the development of classroom practice through the 'trios' coaching programme are being used well to drive further improvements in teaching.
- The sixth form is satisfactory but is improving quickly and securely thanks to excellent leadership and management by a relatively new sixth form leader. The implementation of a rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluation to match that found in the main school is successfully reducing the variation that remains across subjects, especially with regard to students' attaining the highest grades.
- The college ensures that there is good provision to support students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. It provides an increasingly personalised curriculum with breadth and balance so that students are able to achieve in ways appropriate to their individual strengths and interests.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further in the sixth form by:
 - eliminating the variability in achievement between sixth form subjects so that all students are consistently challenged and supported to reach the highest grades.
- Strengthen the overall quality of teaching and, at an individual teacher level, achieve greater consistency of good or outstanding practice by:
 - moving more of the good teaching to outstanding and eradicating the small amount of weaker teaching
 - ensuring that the quality of all lessons matches the best in the college through effective dissemination of exemplary teaching to help others to understand how to improve their own practice
 - ensuring that teachers are equally effective in checking the progress of all learners during lessons and therefore able to reshape learning activities to meet individual needs, provide high levels of challenge and secure consistently good or better progress
 - ensuring consistency in the use of day-to-day assessment so that all pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their work through high quality subject-specific verbal and written feedback.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Parents and carers are generally pleased with the progress made by their children. Inspection evidence, including from lesson observations, current assessment information and the school's accurate appraisals of teaching, show that the large majority of students make good progress against their starting points. They generally apply skills well to a range of activities and their literacy skills are being enhanced by the college's work to embed common approaches to develop better quality written and verbal communication. Students collaborate willingly during lessons and use new technologies effectively. Learning is strongest where teachers use their acute knowledge of students' individual strengths and weaknesses to deftly target provision to meet individual needs and maximise progress. However, college leaders know that sometimes learning activities are not sufficiently fine-tuned in lessons to ensure that progress is consistently good or better for all groups of students.

In 2010, there was a significant rise in students' attainment. While this improvement stalled somewhat in 2011, attainment was still significantly above average for key measures and in a number of GCSE subjects. The standards seen in lessons and students' books and the school's latest analysis of current performance indicate that progress is once again accelerating and the overall trend of improvement is set to continue. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make similar

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progress to their peers because of the high quality individual and personalised support programmes which are put in place. Students known to be eligible for free school meals consistently make better progress than that of their peers nationally.

Well-considered changes to leadership and management arrangements have resulted in efficient and detailed monitoring of progress and attainment for different groups which has led to more appropriately tailored support for students. Weaker performance in the core science GCSE last year has been tackled robustly and achievement is rising again. Despite above average attainment, overall analysis of progress for boys shows that in the past two years they have been significantly outperformed by girls. A sharp focus on improving literacy skills, the quality of teaching and a more sophisticated approach to tracking performance have helped to quickly close the gap in achievement. As a result, boys' progress is accelerating and the gap between boys' and girls' achievement is predicted to be in line with that found nationally.

Improvements in achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 have not yet been fully matched in the sixth form. Some variation remains across subjects and, while students make satisfactory progress overall and some make good progress, the proportion attaining the best grades is not yet high enough, given students' starting points. Systems for monitoring the performance of students and subjects have been significantly strengthened and good teaching is now being matched by better use of assessment information. As a result, students are increasingly making good progress, although it is too early for the impact of these improvements to be seen fully in public examinations.

Quality of teaching

The strengths of teaching outweigh any relative weaknesses. Students and their parents/carers rightly express confidence in the quality of teaching overall but recognise that there is still some variation in quality at individual teacher level. The large majority of lessons observed were good or better. Positive relationships and behaviour feature in most classes and help to establish an atmosphere conducive to learning. The most effective teachers know exactly where students are in their learning, understand when they are ready to take the next steps and convey clearly how this can best be achieved. They are skilled in tailoring activities that stretch and challenge all learners regardless of their starting point so that their progress is consistently good or better. Learning of all pupils, especially boys, was optimised when teachers successfully integrated the development of literacy and communication skills into their planning. Students' learning and progress were palpable when they were able to use key vocabulary to articulate ideas fluently and then apply them confidently to produce high quality extended writing.

Lessons are typically well planned and students' learning is usually well managed through engaging activities and questioning that deepens understanding and extends thinking. A Year 13 Religious Education lesson made judicious use of probing questions and engaging activities to layer learning so that all students were able to

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fully explore the concept of emotivism. Consequently, the quality of responses and confident use of subject-specific terminology by students as they drew on previous learning to reflect upon values and beliefs was excellent. A GCSE English lesson made use of a range of assessment activities and high quality dialogue to support students in preparation for their controlled assessment. Students made good use of the college's common approach towards creating high quality writing. The teacher engaged students in the identification and exemplification of features that characterise A*/A work. As a result, the teacher was able to empower students to identify, exemplify and then apply the key features that characterise A*/A work. However, these skills are not yet apparent in all teaching. Elsewhere good practice prevails, although inspectors observed satisfactory learning more frequently than that which was outstanding. College leaders recognise the need to continue the process of strengthening teaching quality as the next significant step on the journey to excellence.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Teaching is typically good, and as a consequence students' behaviour and attitudes make a strong contribution to learning. In the most engaging lessons, behaviour was outstanding. Students are courteous and respectful towards each other and adults, which contributes to a safe and well-ordered environment. They are punctual to school and in arriving at lessons. Students have a good awareness of the different forms of bullying and report that incidents of bullying are infrequent but when it does occur, then it is dealt with speedily and effectively by staff. Most parents, carers and students agree that standards of behaviour and the quality of teaching are good. 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. Where students' behaviour was less than good in lessons, it was clearly linked to learning activities that failed to sufficiently challenge learners and fully engage their interest. This disinterest can manifest itself in some low-level off-task behaviour by a small number of students. However, most students reported good behaviour over time. A scrutiny of behavioural records confirmed this.

An analysis of the school's behaviour tracking data indicates that exclusions and incidents of poor behaviour are steadily reducing year on year. They also confirm the increasing effectiveness of the school's support and reintegration for the small number of students who exhibit more challenging behaviour. The work of the student development department and the creation of more appropriate curriculum pathways have been central to this improvement. These are valuable aspects of provision and students say how much they appreciate that they are known well as individuals and that their different needs are catered for. Attendance has improved to be just above the national average, and is rising.

Leadership and management

The principal and the senior leadership team have created a shared vision for

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improvement among most staff and the governing body. Ambition is articulated through high expectations and a mission to enable every student to succeed. Equality of opportunity sits at the heart of the college's work and manifests itself in the good achievement of students in the main school and a sixth form that is now well placed to maintain its upward trajectory. A broad and balanced curriculum with a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities deepens and broadens students' experience and makes a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The college has continued to build upon the strengths identified in the previous inspection and these strengths have been complemented by key appointments to the leadership and management of English, mathematics and the sixth form. The actions of the governing body make a worthy contribution to continuing improvement and add to the good capacity to improve further. Their developing expertise in evaluating the performance of subjects, key phases and groups of students in relation to national expectations is utilised well to challenge and rectify any underperformance.

College leaders at all levels have a detailed, accurate and realistic understanding of the college's strengths and areas for development. Strong support from senior leaders and access to a good range of professional development opportunities have enabled most middle leaders to sharpen improvement planning and drive up the quality of teaching. Assessment information is used stringently to set challenging targets, comprehensively track students' progress and devise successful programmes of intervention which address any potential underachievement. The establishment of cross-subject coaching 'trios' and the excellent work of the vice-principal and the teaching and learning group has created an environment where training and discussion about learning are highly valued by all staff. Although there is not yet a consistent picture in every lesson, the information is being used to help all staff identify where to intervene to provide additional support and where new teaching strategies need to be developed to improve learning. Consequently, the quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and achievement has risen.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. The school takes the protection of its pupils very seriously and effective procedures and training are in place to keep pupils safe. The curriculum makes a good contribution to students' achievement and enjoyment of school life. It engages students in learning and supports them effectively to take the next steps in their education, training or employment.

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.



6 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Sidmouth College, Sidmouth EX10 9LG

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your college 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 college to be good. It 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 college's work. Mr Roberts and his 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 college'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 college 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 good 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 Mr Roberts and his team to continue raising attainment and ensure that teaching continues to improve by:

- raising achievement and the quality of provision across all subjects in the sixth form so that these are in line with the rest of the school
- enabling teachers to share their best ideas across all subjects and learn from each other so that all teaching is consistently good or better
- ensuring that teachers consistently give you high quality feedback in lessons and on your work to stretch and challenge your thinking and better meet your individual learning needs so that you know how to improve in each subject.

You can 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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