

Stoke Damerel Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113547
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	364567
Inspection dates	23–24 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	1425
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jan Cole
Headteacher	Carol Hannaford
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2007
School address	Somerset Place Plymouth PL3 4BD
Telephone number	01752 556065
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. They observed 41 teachers and 41 lessons, and saw parts of tutor time. Discussions were held with senior and middle managers, staff, members of the governing body and groups of students. The inspectors looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning documents, external evaluations of the school's work, policy documents, minutes of the governing body meetings, the work in exercise books and assessment data of selected year groups. They also scrutinised 183 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, as well as questionnaires completed by staff and a sample of students from each year group.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key questions.

- How well are teachers using their knowledge about individual students to promote challenge, develop initiative and deepen students' critical thinking in mathematics?
- Are the more-able students achieving as well as they can in their work?
- What is the impact of the curriculum, the partnerships and care guidance and support in promoting high expectations of those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities?
- What is the impact of leadership and management on the provision in the sixth form and how successful is this in securing good outcomes for students?

Information about the school

Stoke Damerel Community College is a large comprehensive school with a sixth form and a designated centre for visually impaired students. The school works within a consortium of two other local colleges and training providers. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average as is the number of students with a statement of special educational needs. Their needs include moderate learning and/or behavioural and emotional difficulties, visual impairment and autism. Most students are White British. A few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few of these students are learning English as an additional language. In the main, these students are of Eastern European backgrounds. Stoke Damerel is an accredited specialist college for mathematics and computing, and a raising achievement partner school. It achieved high performing specialist school status in 2008 and has achieved numerous recognitions including, in the last three years, advanced consultant status, Investors in People award, Artsmark, Basic Skills quality mark and the International Schools award.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Stoke Damerel College is an outstanding school. Not only is it enabling all its students to learn and make progress at an impressive rate but, in the words of many students, 'It is also a great place to learn.' Staff too recognise this is a place where, 'We all work hard together with the common aims of supporting our students and each other to be the best we all possibly can be.' Under the dynamic leadership of the headteacher, the school has developed a culture where learning is valued and aspirations are high for everyone. The students from diverse backgrounds and a wide range of needs show a high level of ambition and reflect positively on their learning. The school fosters an atmosphere of inclusion and 'can do, will do', and the overwhelming majority of outcomes that relate to students' personal development are outstanding. Fair, yet strong, discipline is underpinned by exceptional care, support and guidance. This, combined with good teaching, has led to examination results that have improved year on year to at least average. From low starting points, students' achievement is good.

The outstanding curriculum is notable for its accuracy in matching the content of subjects to the needs of all learners. The knowledge the school acquires about students' performance and personal qualities, well before they enter in Year 7, is indicative of the priority the school leaders give to personalising the curriculum. The school's specialism in mathematics and computing have been utilised effectively to drive forward ambition and independent learning. Students' performances are monitored carefully across the full range of outcomes and against high yet realistic expectations. These targets, challenging, as they are, never remain static. The students and their parents and carers play a central role in adjusting and adapting these according to circumstance. The successes are for all to see. Almost all students enter education or training post-16 and a minority of more-able students secure good GCSE passes a year or two ahead of time.

Teaching and learning are good overall with about one fifth of lessons observed outstanding. The use of assessment information to precisely plan for each student's needs in lessons is excellent. Students have an impressive knowledge of exactly what they need to do to improve, and guidance in the lesson through questions and well-matched learning objectives are strong features of the vast majority of lessons. Whilst the better teaching makes use of a rich variety of opportunities for students to engage in learning, in pairs and small groups, this is not always the case. Astute monitoring of teaching has enabled the school to focus on the development of teaching and learning, particularly in mathematics, with excellent results.

The leadership and management are outstanding. The success of the school and its outstanding capacity is due to the deeply embedded culture of staff development. All adults are valued for the individual qualities they bring and these are nurtured through highly personalised training programmes. The governing body work well with staff and in

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partnership with parents to ensure that the underlying principles of highest academic achievement and care can be delivered. School self-evaluation is precise. It is honest, based on first-hand experience of all senior and middle leaders, and complemented by the views of all stakeholders. External monitoring regularly checks upon the school's view of itself and confirmation, both of direction of travel and the innovative practices in teaching, are proudly displayed and only serve to raise the bar even higher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by:
 - ensuring that there are more opportunities in lessons for learners to experience a variety of ways of learning together
 - encourage more active participation from students through dialogue and discussion in all lessons to stimulate a greater capacity for their ideas and contributions to taking learning forward.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students apply themselves well in lessons and enjoy learning with each other. Those students who act as learning leaders in lessons take their role seriously. They listen well to each other, particularly when they are explaining how to work through problems or explain what the tasks entail. Students talk well about what they are learning and know precisely how this fits into the goals they have mapped out on their personal 'flight' plans. Work is carefully planned to challenge every student, regardless of ability. Because the students are involved in the planning, they engage positively with the teaching and show tremendous ambition. Consequently, in the vast majority of lessons, students were making at least good progress.

Attainment is currently average and the results already gained for examinations in 2011 and 2012 are once again exceeding the challenging targets set to take attainment above average. For the last four years, examination results have improved, almost doubling the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE grades including English and mathematics. The accuracy of targeted intervention and the early entry into examinations for the more able has contributed to this rise in attainment. Students join the school with low attainment. National data showing the progress students make over the last three years are some of the best in the country, and indicate that students have made outstanding progress by the time they leave in Year 11. The school's own reliable and accurate analysis, confirmed by lesson observations and scrutiny of work, shows that the vast majority of students of all abilities across the school are meeting aspirational targets. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those at risk of falling behind receive outstanding support. Subject leaders, in conjunction with tutors and learning managers, ensure that support in lessons or teaching time for small groups is carefully tailored to blend both the academic needs and social needs all students. As a consequence, patterns of achievement across the groups of students that make up the school population are very consistent. Students known to be eligible for free school meals, for example, make notably faster progress than those in other schools. Particularly impressive is the high level of take-up for outdoor education and extra-curricular activity amongst those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The personal confidence

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and aspirations amongst these students is high, their commitment to learning equally strong. They are encouraged to work independently and provided with exactly the right conditions to make this possible. Those who are learning English as an additional language acquire relevant skills and develop understanding well at a stage consistent with their abilities because of good quality language support in lessons.

The students make a very significant contribution to the school and local community through their role as student councilors, mentors and lead learners in lessons. In addition to running the school magazines and raising money for local, national and international charities, the students organise their own film channel on the school website. Entirely managed by students, the group has brought students together from across all groups in the school to capture and celebrate the impressive range of activities and projects undertaken. The schools specialism in this area has had a powerful impact students' personal development and on raising aspirations amongst the school community. The Year 11 student council have spearheaded a campaign to raise the challenge to reach 100% attendance in Key Stage 4. The students' attendance improvement plan has resulted in changes to the timetabling of lesson and tutor meetings. Students from the diversity group organised a local community 'tea party'; celebrating the historic and contemporary cultures of the area. Such projects make a significant contribution to students' leadership, collaborative and communication skills, in preparing them for their futures.

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	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
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

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How effective is the provision?

A real strength of this school is the fact that students are known so well by all those who teach and care for them. This was reiterated at every point by students and staff during the inspection. The leadership and management structure of the school ensures that tutors, learning managers and senior leaders have a coherent approach towards support and development of students which ties in personal well-being with academic success. Very good liaison with external agencies supports the school's endeavours to achieve the best outcome for each student. Students receive excellent guidance for the next stage of their life.

At its best, teaching is inspiring. Inspectors saw some creative and challenging lesson activities across a range of subjects. This was certainly the case in a Year 9 mathematics lesson, where the skilful use of a video clip of Hurricane Katrina was used to draw out the practical applications of formulae. The opportunities for group work and to learn from each other were skilfully woven into this fast-paced lesson. Not all lessons provide enough opportunities for students to explore and generate their own ideas. In a small minority of lessons, there was a tendency for teachers to over-direct proceedings, the opportunities to stretch learners were limited, and progress slowed. Students play an active role in developing good teaching and learning through regular feedback to learning managers. As a result, teachers now involve students more in lesson planning and delivery with the result that students are increasingly articulate about how they are learning. Self-assessment is exemplary. Students have access to all the information they need to improve on their work through marking and discussion and use the opportunities to attend homework, revision and tutor surgeries to address gaps in their own learning.

The school has been highly successful at developing the curriculum to match the diverse range of needs and this is reflected in the excellent individualised programmes for gifted and talented students and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The exemplary curriculum partnership between the English and mathematics departments has resulted in subject-wide delivery of basic literacy and numeracy skills. The range of academic qualifications, complemented by excellent extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities, and a learning skills programme are central to securing students' outstanding progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

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How effective are leadership and management?

A powerful and committed senior leadership team supports the principal, sharing a clear and ambitious vision for the school. The unwavering belief that everyone can achieve the highest possible goals is woven into leadership and management at every point and sustained through extremely well targeted professional development and training. The blend of expert training, with judicious use made of expertise within the school team, has resulted in a highly skilled workforce capable of sustaining the impressive rate of improvement. For example, experienced teachers are given roles as leaders on a range of topics pertinent to the improvement of learning in lessons, whilst departmental heads play their part in teaching some of the students whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. The impact on students' outcomes is secured because of continuous monitoring by all staff of what is and is not working. Year group and subject performance reviews provide rigorous and comprehensive analyses of a vast range of data relating to all outcomes and provision. When practice is not as good as it should be, action is quickly taken to bring about improvement. For example, the highly successful partnership between the English mathematics department results in effective sharing of strategies for developing communication and thinking skills. This enables learners to participate more in their mathematics lessons. One of the keys to success is empowering staff to take risks and to 'give them their head' to experiment and improve things where they see fit. The innovations in developing student lead learners have markedly raised the confidence of all learners to lead and reflect on their learning.

Equality of opportunity and an equal right to success are at the heart of the school's success. The school promotes the rights of all very well, both through provision and by the way it ensures the rigorous promotion of achievement for all students despite some inconsistencies in ensuring active participation of learners in some lessons. The school is outward-looking and no more so than in the work it does to promote the safety and welfare of students in the community through working with multi agency partnerships. The regular team around the child meetings, support of the parent support adviser and the open access to a range of therapies for families ensure that very high-quality safeguarding practices complement the outstanding care, guidance and support. Staff use information and communication technology (ICT) particularly well to maintain close and regular links with parents and carers, and parental support groups are very effective at sustaining engagement. Exchange visits and international school projects provide the international dimension to community cohesion. The governing body is an active partner in developing very productive links with local employers. The school also engages well with the community through its trust partners, Plymouth University, TwoFour Group Ltd, The Inclusion Trust, and Plymouth National Health Service. These partnerships are helping to remove barriers to learning and, through some 300 projects, help students to be leaders in their school and in their communities. School leaders and the governing body are passionate about these links because they have proved that supporting best practice amongst their partners helps improve the chances for students' success in their onward journeys.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students join the sixth form with attainment that is below the average for sixth form learners. Since 2007, the percentage of students successfully completing advanced level courses has increased, as has the average points score per student. In 2010, students made good progress and their attainment was average. There is no significant variation in the achievements of students. An above average proportion of students complete their courses and attendance has improved to 91%. Students in the sixth form contribute well to the life of the school. They report, 'Student voice is real here and the college responds to what we say.' They participate in a large variety of extra-curricular activities, develop leadership skills in several settings and make many contributions to the development of younger students. They contribute to development of the local communities through activities with other colleges and have organised successful multimedia campaigns to convey their viewpoints to a national audience.

The rich curriculum is under constant review and is updated annually to respond to the wide range of students' needs. Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers use evidence of students' prior achievement to develop personalised learning programmes, using a variety of methods. Students are encouraged to develop as independent learners, for example through the use of information and communication technology and by working on extended projects. Assessment is regular and detailed, with students receiving constructive feedback. Individual care and support is a strength of the sixth form and there are many examples of where the college has gone to great lengths to enable students from challenging backgrounds to achieve their potential. There is a high level of skilled individual advice and guidance that prepares students well for the next stages of their lives, in employment or higher education. The capacity for sustained improvement in the sixth form is outstanding. The complementary skills of the management team ensure

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self-evaluation of provision is prompt, accurate and leads to targeted intervention to secure continuous improvement.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The questionnaire return rate numbers was lower than average for secondary schools. The very large majority of parents and carers who responded were overwhelmingly positive about all but a few aspects of the school and some positive endorsement by way of additional comments were received. The comments that, 'Parent/teacher communication is particularly of an excellent standard in person or through email', and that, 'Any issues, serious or not, are dealt with efficiently', were typical of the sentiments expressed. A minority of parents expressed concern over behaviour management. Inspectors judged this to be very effective. The inspectors explored the dissatisfaction about the promotion of healthy lifestyles. The students have a very good awareness of the full range of health matters. A few students and their parents and carers would like to see the school do more. We have asked students to help with this.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Stoke Damerel Community College 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 183 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1425 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	60	33	110	60	9	5	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	70	38	106	58	5	3	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	85	47	88	48	6	3	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	79	43	95	52	7	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	72	40	102	56	6	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	48	26	115	63	12	7	3	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	39	21	112	62	22	12	3	2
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)	66	36	101	55	7	4	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	70	38	99	54	7	4	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	62	34	90	49	16	9	7	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	40	22	119	65	12	7	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	67	37	97	53	4	2	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	83	46	86	47	10	5	1	1

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

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



25 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Stoke Damerel Community College, Plymouth, PL3 4BD

Thank you so much for the kindness and enthusiasm you showed during our recent visit to your school. It is such a vibrant place with so much positive energy. It is an outstanding school. Here are just a few of the main reasons for reaching this judgement:

The help you get from each other and all the staff to make the most of your talents and abilities is first rate.

No matter what your starting point, you are all treated with respect and given every opportunity to flourish.

The staff maintain a close track on your academic progress and make sure that the expectations they have of you are realistic and encourage you to aspire to reach ever higher personal goals.

The leaders in the school manage the staff and the curriculum exceptionally well to ensure you make outstanding progress.

You all embrace the many rich opportunities provided for you to take on responsibilities and develop the personal skills required to confidently move into the workplace or higher education.

The school know there is no standing still. We have asked that they make sure teachers use a wider range of strategies to ensure that you all learn well in all lessons. From talking to many of you, we know how well you lead improvement in the school. For example, in bringing communities together, as lead learners and tackling poor attendance. You could look for more ways to encourage everybody in the school and community to adopt healthy lifestyles. This is something a few parents and students would welcome.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Palk

Her Majesty's Inspector

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