

# South Molton Community College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	113512
<b>Local authority</b>	Devon
<b>Inspection number</b>	385540
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 June 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Robert Pyner HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	550
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jeremy Yabsley
<b>Principal</b>	Jenny Glover
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12–13 March 2007
<b>School address</b>	Old Alswear Road South Molton EX36 4LA
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<b>Fax number</b>	01769 573351
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<b>Age group</b>	11–16
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	13–14 June 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	385540



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## Introduction

### Inspection team

Robert Pyner

Her Majesty's Inspector

Anne Looney

Additional inspector

Kevin Wright

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 32 lesson observations or inspection activities amounting to over 14 hours of direct engagement with teaching staff and students. These included 13 joint observations with senior leaders; in all, 27 teachers were observed. Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, staff and students. A telephone conversation was held with one parent. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the college's work, and looked at progress tracking and performance data, the college development plan, students' work and numerous policies, guidelines, plans and reviews. An inspector heard some Year 7 students read. The questionnaire responses from 171 parents and carers, 99 students and 66 staff were also analysed. At the time of the inspection Year 11 students were on study leave.

## Information about the school

South Molton Community College is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and serves the town and an extensive rural area. Almost half the students travel to and from the college by local authority bus transport. Most students are from a White British heritage and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with statements of special educational needs is in line with the national average; students' needs include specific and moderate learning and behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. The college currently meets the government's floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. Its subject specialism is technology. The Principal and senior leadership team have all been appointed since the previous inspection.

**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

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- This is a good college. It is not yet outstanding because, despite strong improvement in attainment and progress over the last three years, more-able students do not consistently make the strong progress seen in other groups. Progress in mathematics has only recently begun to show the strong improvement seen in other subjects. The basis for this good improvement over time has been the development of an effective progress tracking system and clear management action based on analysis of outcomes. The strong drive for improvement is clear at all levels across the college.
- Outcomes for Year 11 students have improved strongly over time, with a number of measures in 2011 significantly above national figures. Current tracking data indicate that the college is on track for further improvements in attainment and progress this year, particularly in mathematics.
- Teaching is effective and monitored regularly. Nevertheless, current systems do not focus sufficiently on students' progress in their learning. Progress tracking data are used effectively to develop intervention programmes across subjects for students in Years 10 and 11 where underachievement is identified and this has played a significant part in the strong improvement in outcomes over time. Intervention programmes for younger year groups are not firmly established. Lessons do not always ensure that there are challenging activities which extend the learning of students, particularly the more able.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Students are friendly, courteous and display excellent attitudes to learning, built on mutual respect.
- The Principal and school leaders at all levels display a strong focus on performance management and development of teaching in order to improve students' achievement. Some parents and carers noted strong concerns about the quality of communication with the college about their children who are disabled or have special educational needs. In addition, the information on achievement available for this group is not used as effectively as it could be to ensure individualised support.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Raise attainment and accelerate progress further for all students by:
  - improving planning in lessons to ensure more sharply focused activities which challenge the specific needs of ability groups, but particularly more-able students
  - ensure that all monitoring of teaching by senior and middle leaders focuses on the progress in learning made by all ability groups, both during individual lessons and over longer periods
  - developing the successful intervention strategies used with Year 10 and 11 students into the younger age groups.
- Improve provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs and their families by:
  - developing better communication systems with parents and carers
  - integrating the progress data for students with specific needs with the whole-college system more effectively in order to provide more individualised and focused support.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

Overall, students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, make good progress throughout their time at the college from broadly average attainment when they enter Year 7. This is corroborated by direct evidence from lesson observations, the scrutiny of work and college tracking of the progress made by students. Furthermore, this is strongly supported by the Ofsted questionnaire responses from parents, carers and students. Achievement measures show strong improvement across most subjects over the last three years. This has resulted from the effective progress tracking system developed and refined over this period, leading to the intervention strategies used for older students where underachievement is identified. This process is supervised by an intervention coordinator and an effective feature of the improvement seen is the allocation of direct responsibility to middle leaders for guiding and supporting identified groups of students. These groups include students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. However, this strong overall improvement has not been seen consistently across all subjects and progress measures for mathematics have lagged behind national figures. Strong management action and support have underpinned reliable estimates for this year which, if achieved, will show significant improvement in this subject. Additionally, progress measures for more-able students are not as strong as for other groups, for example girls.

Attainment has risen strongly over the last three years including the proportion of students gaining five or more higher GCSE grades including English and mathematics. In 2011, outcome measures for English, mathematics and science, together with measures of performance across a range of subjects for each student, were all significantly above national averages. The development of more appropriate

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courses within the college's specialism, technology, for example construction and engineering, has led to a clear improvement in take-up by students. College data indicate strong outcomes for this year.

Students who spoke to inspectors said that they enjoy their lessons and greatly appreciate the high quality of relationships with adults and other students which enable them to learn effectively. Almost all students who responded to the questionnaire as part of the inspection noted that the college helped them to do as well as they can and that they learn a lot in lessons. They were particularly positive about how the college helps them to develop their skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. There is effective support for reading and literacy skills through a newly introduced programme for Year 7 students, as well as a programme for developing independent learning skills developed across the schools in the area. However, overall, intervention programmes for students in Key Stage 3 are not well established and this can mean that some students do not make the strong progress seen in older year groups.

### **Quality of teaching**

Responses by parents, carers and students to the inspection questionnaire show that most feel that teaching is effective. Lessons are mostly based on good planning with clear learning objectives and strong subject knowledge. These underpin effective questioning which enables the teacher to adjust the learning undertaken by students. An example of this was seen in a mathematics lesson with a Year 9 group working on facts about angles. Students were encouraged to work in pairs and, by moving around the room, develop posters with information built up by different pairings. The activities were clearly planned to match specific abilities and needs and this ensured activities challenged students well. Students enjoyed the practical nature of the task, building up their understanding as the lesson progressed. The learning was well paced and the effective relationships meant students had the confidence to try things out even if they were unsure. As one student said, 'I don't really like maths but the teacher makes it interesting.'

The best teaching observed during the inspection, as in the example above, involved activities which were well matched to students' abilities and there was time for them to undertake challenging activities. These well-matched tasks were given to groups or individuals as the main part of the lesson and not just as an extension activity. Consequently, students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, were developing their knowledge, understanding and skills throughout the lesson. However, this good level of challenge was not evident in all lessons. Where teaching was satisfactory, students were often undertaking the same task directed by the teacher which meant that there was insufficient challenge for significant groups, often more-able students who could undertake more complex or open-ended tasks.

Students say that they do read the marking in their books and some teachers direct them to review the suggestions made for improvement as part of lessons. However,

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although marking is variable, there are effective systems in some subjects, for example English, modern foreign languages, geography and science; a new system has been introduced in mathematics. The more effective systems enable students to reflect on their work and targets as well as providing clear and specific guidance on what they need to do to improve.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent. Most parents and carers, students and staff responding to the inspection questionnaire were very positive about behaviour. Furthermore, almost all students reported that they feel safe always, or most of the time, with a similar proportion of parents and carers reporting their high satisfaction with procedures for safety. Students, who spoke to inspectors, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, said that they are very well cared for and greatly appreciated the high quality of the relationships found in the college. As one student said, 'Staff can sense if something is wrong and get things sorted out.' These highly supportive relationships are the result of the policy of allocating groups of students with specific needs to middle leaders who are responsible for their care and academic progress. At a broader level, the assertive tutoring programme ensures that all students have regular discussions with form tutors regarding their progress and this information is shared with parents and carers. These strategies have resulted in the college being an extremely harmonious and hard-working community where students make an excellent contribution to their learning.

Students reported that they understand very well the various types of bullying that can occur, including cyber bullying, but that this is rare and staff will deal with it effectively when it does occur. Staff work very effectively to support students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. As a result, exclusion rates are significantly below national averages and permanent exclusions are extremely rare. This demonstrates the very high standard of behaviour over time.

Attendance is above average due to the effective systems in place to monitor absence across the college. Leaders analyse data about attendance and behaviour carefully and use this information to identify any individual or more general trends in attendance or behaviour so that additional support can be provided.

### **Leadership and management**

The Principal displays a very strong drive for improvement and is well supported by an effective senior leadership team. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the college using data of all types very effectively to make decisions about improvement priorities and to evaluate outcomes. Performance management systems for teachers are well structured supported by informal observations through, for example, learning walks (short visits to classrooms) by senior leaders and heads of subject departments. Formal observations are recorded, but these do not focus sufficiently on the progress in learning made by students.

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Furthermore, performance management reviews do not all consistently note specific development points for individual teachers resulting from monitoring procedures. Teachers spoken to noted the effective use of the virtual learning environment for sharing good practice across the curriculum.

In a small college, middle leaders have a range of responsibilities but this is turned to an advantage giving the opportunity for a comprehensive view of individual students supporting the highly effective relationships found. Governors have a clear understanding of the work of the college and are implementing new systems to develop closer working between lead governors and members of the senior leadership team. In the inspection questionnaire responses, some parents and carers noted strongly that the communication with the college regarding disabled students and those with special educational needs could be improved. Given the very good quality of the progress data available for all students, this is not used consistently to develop strongly individualised programmes for students with specific needs to maximise their learning. Overall, however, the broad strengths found at the college mean that it is in a good position to sustain further improvement.

The curriculum is broad and balanced; students benefit from effective guidance which leads to most students being able to choose an appropriate range of academic and vocational options which lead to good opportunities for further study or employment. The curriculum makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, students prepared and delivered a presentation to the county planning committee as part of a successful campaign for a pedestrian crossing near the college.

The college effectively promotes equality and tackles discrimination. The very high quality of relationships and strong focus on guidance and support for individuals and groups means that most students, but especially those who may be vulnerable, can take full advantage of the opportunities available to them. Safeguarding procedures are a very strong feature and the college has evidence of highly effective support for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable.



## 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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](http://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.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.**



15 June 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of South Molton Community College, South Molton EX36 4LA**

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we inspected your college recently. Special thanks go to the student guides who helped the inspectors find their way around, the groups who met inspectors and to those of you who completed the questionnaire; we found these very useful. We enjoyed talking with all the students we met and found what you had to say very informative and relevant.

This letter is to tell you about our findings. South Molton Community College is good overall. The levels of achievement attained by students when they leave at the end of Year 11 have been improving strongly over the last few years and progress tracking data for this year indicate further improvement. Students make good progress in their learning overall, although this could be greater for more-able groups. You and your parents and carers told inspectors that you feel very safe in the college and that staff help you in many ways to do as well as you can. We were very impressed with your behaviour and attitudes to learning so, overall, this is outstanding. Teaching is generally good with some that is outstanding across the college.

The Principal, senior staff and governors provide effective leadership and management. They recognise that there are aspects of the college that can be improved further, and these are the areas that the inspection team identified.

- Develop activities in lessons which really challenge students, but particularly the more-able groups. Introduce the intervention groups currently in Years 10 and 11 into Key Stage 3 so that the younger age groups can benefit from them in order to support their learning.
- Improve the support for students with special educational needs.

You too have an important part to play by continuing to work hard, attending regularly and making the most of the wide range of opportunities you have at the college.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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