



# Coombe Dean School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 113538  
**LEA** Plymouth  
**Inspection number** 279194  
**Inspection dates** 18 May 2006 to 19 May 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Ian Stuart AI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Charnhill Way
<b>School category</b>	Community		Elburton
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18		Plymouth, Devon PL9 8ES
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01752 406961
<b>Number on roll</b>	1071	<b>Fax number</b>	01752 482140
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	4 October 1999	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Patrick Freat

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	18 May 2006 - 19 May 2006	279194

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Coombe Dean School is a larger than average comprehensive school and has 180 students in the sixth form. It became a specialist Mathematics and Computing College in 2003. Students come from all areas of Plymouth and beyond. Their backgrounds are varied but include significant numbers from areas of social disadvantage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is a little below average, and the proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly average. Very few students are from minority ethnic groups.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

Coombe Dean is a good and improving school with many outstanding features. It has used its specialist status very well in its drive to raise standards, enhance its curriculum and extend its links with the community. The school has a clear and accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. As a result, it has been successfully tackling weaker areas, including issues from the last inspection. The school gives good value for money.

Standards have been average for some years, but present work is above average. In relation to students' standards on entry, their achievement is good and improving. Overall, teaching is good. Teachers make lessons enjoyable and their relationships with students are very good. As a result, most students learn well. The school has extensive and good systems to monitor teaching which help raise its quality. However, both teaching, and the way it is monitored, do not always focus sufficiently sharply on the impact that teaching has on the learning of different groups of students in the class. Therefore, in a few lessons, there are slight variations in the rate of progress that different students make.

Achievement is helped by the outstanding curriculum. There have been significant and continuing improvements in recent years. The curriculum is considerably enhanced by very effective links with other schools and colleges. The excellent care, guidance and support for students mean that the vast majority enjoy their school life and that they develop outstandingly as young people well equipped to play their part as citizens of the 21st century.

The considerable strengths of the school reflect high quality leadership and management at all levels, including the headteacher. Leaders are thoughtful and have a very clear vision for future developments which is very effectively shared with other staff. Innovative features such as the Student Learning Forum involve students in improvements very well. With this common sense of purpose and its underlying strengths, the school has considerable potential to improve further.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

Inspection evidence supports the school's view that it has a good, cost-effective and improving sixth form. Because teaching is good, students make good progress in lessons and achieve well. High quality information and guidance ensure that students follow courses that well match their interests and aptitudes. Consequently, almost all complete their courses successfully. Students hold the school in very high regard and speak in glowing terms of the help, support, care and guidance that they receive in the sixth form. Through well coordinated partnerships with other providers, the school offers an outstanding range of academic and vocational programmes. It also offers an exceptional range of extra-curricular opportunities for sixth formers.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

• ensure that the monitoring of teaching focuses more sharply on the impact that teaching has on the learning of all students • ensure that all lessons take full account of the needs of all students.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Students are achieving well in relation to their standards on entry, though the achievement of a small number of girls was satisfactory rather than good in the 2005 GCSE examinations. In recent years, standards have been broadly average but are now above average. Achievement is getting better and standards are rising in all year groups. The first-rate systems to check students' progress and to support students who are not on track to meet their targets are major reasons for rising standards. Furthermore, the school's accurate analysis of strengths and weaknesses in its performance has led to changes and improvements to the curriculum and some teaching practices. These improvements have motivated students better, leading to their achieving better. Targets for 2006 are very challenging and students are on course to meet them.

Whilst the underlying trend is of improving achievement, there is potential for achievement to rise further. Achievement in art and design is exceptionally high, and achievement in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) is also strong. However, occasionally, teaching does not concentrate as sharply as it should on meeting the needs of all students in the class. As a result, sometimes, in individual lessons, there are variations in the rate of progress of different students. Nonetheless, over time, all groups, including higher attainers, make good progress. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are particularly well supported, ensuring that their progress is at least as good as other students.

Achievement in the sixth form is now good. In recent years, it has lagged a little behind the rest of the school. Significant improvements in management structures and in the support students receive are leading to greater success for sixth formers. Although the rate of improvement in achievement is accelerating and standards are rising, the current standards are lower than those usually found because of the low starting points for many students.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They enjoy coming to school and attend well because they know they will be sufficiently challenged by their many opportunities to grow both academically and emotionally. Most behave in an exemplary way with only a few occasionally spoiling the first-rate atmosphere in the school. Mutual respect between students and adults is excellent. Many students feel that the school staff listen very attentively to their views. Changes in the way

students are taught and to the uniform they wear are examples of the extremely positive contribution students make to the school community.

Most students adopt safe practices and follow healthy lifestyles, including high levels of participation in sport and fitness programmes. Students demonstrate maturity when talking about sensitive personal and educational issues. They are very aware of the challenges of adult life. They feel supported by their school as they make the choices that will determine their future paths and well-being. All aspects of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. Students respect the dignity of others, often helping and supporting the outstanding work the school does with those whose educational needs are more complicated than those of the majority. Many involve themselves very successfully in the wider community by, for example, taking the initiative in charity events. They are a remarkable body of students, clearly making the most of their school days and laying firm foundations for adult life.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching is good throughout the school. Most lessons are enjoyable and relationships between teachers and students are very good. As a result, students learn well and show good attitudes to their work. Careful and accurate assessments ensure that all students get the help and support they need. The school's specialist status has brought much modern technology to the classroom to help teaching and learning. Teachers make exceptionally good use of interactive whiteboards, and students use their ICT skills very well in many lessons.

An outstanding Year 7 geography lesson on conflicting interests in a National Park typifies the school's best teaching. A very lively and informative input from the teacher, with excellent written and visual resources, and supplemented by a splendid mix of varied activities for students, led to very rapid learning. The topic was most demanding, but the first-rate role play exercise was great fun and got all students actively involved. It also gave opportunities for the teacher and teaching assistant to support and challenge individuals and groups.

Through the regular monitoring of teaching, good practice is identified and shared successfully. However, in a few lessons, students' progress does not always advance as far as it could. This is because the teaching does not always take full account of the needs of different groups of students. Nonetheless, in an excellent initiative, teachers and students are working very effectively together to improve learning through discussions in the Student Learning Forum.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The outstanding curriculum in the main school and in the sixth form meets the needs of all students extremely well. Excellent planning ensures that all students have a wide

range of options and courses to follow as they get older. Improvements in recent years mean that students are increasingly able to choose from a wide mix of academic, vocational and practical courses which satisfy their individual aspirations and capabilities. In the sixth form, students continue to have an excellent choice of academic and vocational courses which they can study in school or through very effective partnerships with other schools and colleges. Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are developed well throughout the school. These ensure that students are well prepared in these essential skills for future employment.

An impressively wide variety of clubs and other activities provides rich additional opportunities for students. Much emphasis on culture through music and film clubs, the very extensive sporting activities and events such as Activities Week contribute to broadening students' experiences. The programme for personal, health and social education is outstandingly good and helps to develop mature individuals very well prepared for life beyond school.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

The outstanding care, guidance and support start before new students arrive. Regular visits to primary schools allow students, particularly those who need additional educational help, to feel safe and welcome. A safe and supportive environment is a hallmark of the school, with very rigorous management of students' welfare both in and out of school. Students say that unacceptable incidents, including cases of bullying, are dealt with very well. The school's strong procedures also mean that students can enjoy visits and take part in studies elsewhere. Sixth formers particularly benefit from this feature. Effective child protection procedures are in place. The services of outside agencies, including, for example, the police and the careers service, are very well co-ordinated for the benefit of all students and, especially, the most vulnerable.

Exceptionally able heads of year and their pastoral teams keep a close watch on students' progress, flagging up any difficulties, challenging when needed, and maintaining close contacts with students' homes. Students are particularly well informed about their future options and opportunities at different stages of their school careers.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides far-sighted leadership and conveys a strong sense of purpose that permeates the whole school community. Able teams of senior and middle leaders work very well together. There is a strongly shared commitment to provide the best opportunities for all students. In the well managed sixth form, students are very pleased with the provision made for them.

The school accurately evaluates its strengths and areas for improvement. Its thoughtful future plans are coherent and well matched to its clearly identified priorities. The progress being made by students is very efficiently assessed so that timely support can be provided. Students and parents express satisfaction with the account taken of

their views by the school when changes are planned. The large numbers of parents who returned their questionnaire were overwhelmingly very pleased with the school and made very few critical comments.

Subject leaders effectively exercise a good degree of responsibility within a well defined framework of support and guidance by senior staff. They evaluate teaching and learning regularly but the information that this yields is sometimes too general to indicate how teaching might be improved to enhance all students' learning. This aspect of self-review is not as sharp as other aspects.

The governing body has a very good understanding of its role and provides good support and challenge to the leaders of the school. Financial planning is prudent and resources are managed very effectively. Management of specialist college status is good. Extra funding has been wisely spent on improving accommodation and resources as well as significantly improving the school's provision for the wider community. The successful bid for, and implementation of, specialist status has been very effective in the drive to raise standards. Similarly, the strong systems of self-review and the shared common purpose provide a very firm base for future developments and demonstrate the school's very good capacity for further improvement.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1	1
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1	1

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for welcoming us in such a friendly way when we visited your school. Your views are very important and we value very much the help you gave us.

Coombe Dean is a good school with many outstanding features. Because you are well taught, nearly all of you are getting on well with your work. The excellent way the school assesses your progress and takes whatever action is needed also helps you to make good progress. There are other very strong features of the school. Your school is excellent at helping you develop as fine young people. The curriculum is outstanding, and the care, guidance and support you are given are also splendid. The school is well run with your headteacher and senior staff giving a strong sense of purpose and direction to the school.

Most of you are very pleased with your school and take full advantage of the many opportunities open to you. You get on very well with each other and with your teachers and other adults. Your good attendance and, apart from a few who spoil things, your good behaviour show that most of you enjoy your time at school.

So, with so much good going on, are there improvements to be made? We are asking the school to look even more closely at the ways you are taught to see whether, sometimes, some of you could be helped to learn even better than at present. We are very pleased that some of you are already playing a very important part in advising the school about teaching and learning methods through the Student Learning Forum. This is an excellent idea and shows the determination of the headteacher and staff to make the school better than it already is.

The school has been improving very well in recent years, helped by its becoming a specialist Mathematics and ICT College, and it is well placed to improve further. I wish you all good luck for the future.