



Great Torrington Community School & Sports College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113510
Local Authority Devon
Inspection number 289659
Inspection date 5 October 2006
Reporting inspector Andrew Redpath HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Calvesford Road
School category	Community		Torrington
Age range of pupils	11–16		EX38 7DJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01805 623531
Number on roll (school)	935	Fax number	01805 624332
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Pam Hargreaves
		Headteacher	Dianne Nicholson
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2001		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Great Torrington Community School is a specialist sports college and an extended school. Pupils are drawn from Torrington and the surrounding area. Although the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average, the school's catchment area includes some neighbourhoods where incomes are low and there is significant deprivation. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few of them have English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) is slightly lower than that found in other schools. However, the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is higher. A programme to rebuild parts of the school is due to start soon.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Great Torrington Community School and Sports College is a good school. High expectations and a strong focus on learning ensure pupils achieve well. Pupils enjoy coming to school, which is demonstrated by their outstanding attendance and positive behaviour. The school's work as a specialist sports college is very effective in promoting pupils' health and fitness and developing their self-esteem. They learn to take responsibility and many participate in the extensive range of clubs and sporting activities. As one appreciative pupil commented, 'You achieve your potential and grow here'.

The curriculum is broad and provides for a wide range of capabilities and interests. The school works well with external partners, both to enrich the curriculum and to provide a high level of care, guidance and support for pupils. The high quality of teaching ensures pupils make good progress and achieve standards which are better than average. This is demonstrated by the consistently good results pupils gain in examinations. Arrangements for setting learning targets and checking on pupils' progress are generally very good and are a significant factor in raising standards. Pupils with LDD make satisfactory progress overall. Pupils at Key Stage 3 have made good progress in recent years. The learning targets of some pupils with LDD are not used to inform planning in all lessons and support is not always closely matched to their needs.

The large majority of parents are happy with the school. They are particularly pleased with how new pupils are welcomed in Year 7. This view is summed up by one parent who wrote, 'My daughter has settled well. She enjoys getting up in the morning and going to school, and comes home feeling good about her work'. A very small number of parents have concerns about pupils' behaviour. Inspection evidence suggests pupils behave well, both in lessons and around the school. Pupils report that they can approach a member of staff if they have a problem and that any incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly. The school seeks to involve parents through regular open evenings and by conducting surveys of their views. A few parents feel that the school does not take sufficient account of their views and suggestions, particularly in relation to the school's rules regarding uniform.

The headteacher and senior management team provide good leadership. They have tackled very effectively issues identified for improvement in the last inspection report. A clear focus on improving teaching and learning has ensured standards have risen each year. The monitoring of teaching is well established, although arrangements for identifying features of the very best lessons and for extending them across the school are underdeveloped. The accommodation has been improved significantly since the previous inspection. Some parts of the building are cramped and require continual maintenance, although plans are in place to rebuild these areas. The school uses resources well and provides good value for money. The strength of leadership and quality of teaching mean the school is well placed for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Check that all pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are given the right level of work and support.
- Strengthen arrangements for identifying the very best features in teaching and for extending their use in lessons across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good. They are generally above average and have improved considerably in recent years as a result of the school's robust systems for target setting and checking pupils' progress. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with attainment which is below the national average. By the end of Year 9 they consistently achieve results in national tests which are above average. This represents outstanding progress given their starting points. The rate of pupils' progress slows at Key Stage 4, although it is good. The school is particularly successful in ensuring an above average proportion of pupils consistently achieve five or more graded GCSE passes. Also, a higher than average number gains C grades or better in English and mathematics. The number of pupils achieving five A* to C GCSE grades is usually higher than the national average and represents good progress given pupils' attainment on entry to the school. The ratio of boys to girls fluctuates widely between year groups, which influences the school's overall results. Girls' attainment is higher than that of boys, which reflects the national picture. Steps have been taken which have been successful in improving the performance of boys. Pupils with LDD make satisfactory progress overall. Pupils at Key Stage 3 have made good progress in recent years. In some lessons work does not always take sufficient account of their prior learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and behave well. Their attendance is excellent. Pupils form good relationships with staff and with each other; as one commented, 'We all get on well here'. They are pleased to talk about their work and how they contribute to the life of the school, for example by serving as prefects or sitting on the school council. A large number of pupils complete the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme or gain the Junior Sports Leadership qualification. These activities involve them in contributing to the community and developing skills for future work. Pupils are very aware of the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle. They eat healthy food at lunchtime and when they purchase snacks from the school tuck shop. Many keep fit by participating in the wide range of sporting and physical activities provided by the school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, although their knowledge of different cultural traditions is limited.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. There is some variation in the quality of teaching. Some teaching is outstanding and there are a few areas that need improvement which the school is tackling. Pupils are particularly impressed with how, in the best lessons, teachers encourage them to discuss issues and provide a variety of activities which captures their interest. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are well informed about national strategies, which they have used very effectively to improve learning. They are particularly successful in sharing assessment information with pupils and focusing them on the next steps in learning

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good and is greatly enhanced by the school's work as a specialist sports college. A wide range of activities, often provided in collaboration with other schools, enriches the curriculum. The curriculum is adapted well to help pupils whose achievement is below average in numeracy and literacy when they enter the school. Teaching in small groups helps many pupils make rapid progress. Some additional provision for pupils with LDD has been introduced recently and the planning is not yet complete. The use of resources to support a very small number of pupils with the most complex needs is underdeveloped. In Years 10 and 11, the school offers courses which are well suited to pupils' interests and aptitudes. Some pupils are able to take GCSEs at the end of Year 10; others follow vocational courses, complete work experience and attend part time at a local college. Pupils speak highly of these courses and the school is planning to develop them further.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support for pupils. The school has established good links with a range of external agencies to support pupils' emotional health and well-being. Some of this support is strengthened as a result of the school's status as an extended school. New pupils are helped to settle in very well when they arrive from primary school, and older pupils appreciate the careers guidance they receive. There are satisfactory procedures for child protection and pupils report they feel comfortable about approaching an adult if they have a concern. Arrangements for staff recruitment are thorough and the necessary checks are carried out to ensure the suitability of staff. Pupils who experience behaviour difficulties benefit from good support and, as a result, exclusions from school are rare. A small number of pupils with LDD do not always receive support which is closely matched to their needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior leaders ensure there is a clear focus on raising standards. They continually evaluate the school's effectiveness and have an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for development. Performance is regularly reviewed and action taken to improve it. The use of assessment and setting of learning targets is very effective in raising standards. Senior leaders work hard and are committed to raising pupils' achievement and promoting their welfare. However, there is some overlap of roles and responsibilities which very occasionally results in issues not being dealt with efficiently. The monitoring of teaching is well established, although arrangements for sharing best practice and for checking the learning of some pupils with LDD are underdeveloped. Governors provide a good level of support and ensure the school fulfils its statutory responsibilities.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, I inspected your school on 5 October. I am writing to let you know the judgements which were made about your school. I thank those of you who helped the inspection by talking to me about your work and your life at the school. All of you were polite and shared your views in a mature way. Many of your parents or carers returned a questionnaire and I also took their views and concerns into account when making judgements. Here are the main points which describe what your school does well and how it can become better.

- Great Torrington Community School and Sports College is a good school.
- You have positive attitudes, behave well and your attendance is outstanding.
- An interesting range of courses is provided, which are well matched to your different interests and abilities.
- Becoming a sports college has helped you to lead healthier lifestyles and many of you enjoy taking part in the extra clubs and activities on offer.
- The headteacher and those with responsibility run the school well to ensure you do your best; they also work closely with people from outside the school to provide you with extra help and support.
- The quality of teaching is good; teachers also discuss your progress regularly and set you challenging targets which help you to gain good results in examinations.
- Some of you described to me examples of very good lessons; I have asked the school to look at how they can share the very best teaching methods across all classes.
- You are helped to settle in quickly when you start the school and many of you who have difficulty with your numeracy and literacy get the help you need.
- The school needs to check more closely that some of you who have difficulty with learning are receiving the right level of extra help; you can help by discussing your progress with teachers.