

# 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>	289660
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 March 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Geoff Hancock

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 on roll</b>	
School	598
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Wendy Short
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jim Wade
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 May 2001
<b>School address</b>	Old Alswear Road South Molton EX36 4LA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01769 572129
<b>Fax number</b>	01769 573351

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

South Molton Community College is a much smaller-than-average, mixed comprehensive school. The school is a designated Technology College. Almost all students are from White British backgrounds and live close by. The level of deprivation in the community is average and the proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is below average. There is very little movement of students to and from other schools. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

South Molton Community College is a place where students of all abilities thrive as a result of the outstanding all-round education they receive. This outstanding provision is built upon the principal's vision of a 'world-class' education and a total commitment to developing the school as a community of learners. No stone is left unturned when it comes to ensuring that every single student achieves their best and there is a remarkable consistency in the way that the school operates. This consistency is borne out of a shared belief and commitment from all staff to make South Molton a caring, challenging and rewarding place for all young people to be.

Students enter the school with average standards and make outstanding progress by Year 9. By Year 11, the above-average results at GCSE represent significantly higher-than-average progress given students' starting points in Year 7. In virtually all subjects students achieve well and in a few, such as English, science and religious education (RE), achievement is exceptional. The personal development and well-being of students is outstanding. Attendance is above average and the outstanding behaviour and positive attitude of the students is the most obvious outward reflection of their growing maturity. The word 'community' has a deep meaning to students; it is a watchword for caring, sharing and taking responsibility. Students are given responsibility but fully understand they are also accountable for what they do. Older students look after younger students, organise activities, provide valuable support to the community and have a good understanding of their role as citizens in the wider world. Students are rightly proud of their school. The quality of care, guidance and level of support for students is outstanding. The students feel totally safe in school and, whilst there are very rare incidents of bullying, these are quickly and effectively dealt with. Most students understand the importance of leading healthy and active lifestyles.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. There are many lessons which provide stimulating and challenging activities for students. In these lessons students learn at a brisk pace because of the excellence of the teaching and high levels of active participation in their learning. Not all lessons are like this but, in the main, teachers plan their lessons effectively using clear objectives and have high expectations of the students. It is this consistency in the teaching, the superb attitude and behaviour of the students and the rigour with which the school monitors student achievement that leads to them making outstanding progress. The school is beginning to develop a strategy for using these outstanding teachers to further improve teaching and learning. The school has developed a good curriculum that enables students of all abilities to study courses which are well suited to their personal needs. Whilst the size of the school limits the amount of courses that can be offered, the school has made an extensive effort to provide an enriching experience for the students. The school's Technology specialism has given momentum to the drive to raise standards in mathematics and science and has enabled the school to invest in new computer hardware.

The quality of leadership and management in the school is outstanding. The principal has a very clear vision for the school which has been translated into a challenging set of plans for further improvement. What is remarkable about the leadership and management is the consistency that has been established. It is this consistency of effort and application together with a shared belief and expectation that is at the heart of South Molton's tremendous success. Leaders at all levels of the school know that they are responsible and above all accountable for the work of their teams. The principal and senior leadership team have a very clear idea of the school's strengths and weaknesses and know what it will take to make South Molton into an

even better school. There is no better example of this than the recent improvement seen in mathematics. This has come about through curriculum changes, close monitoring of teaching and learning and the targeting and supporting of students who were not reaching their expected grades. The College has improved year on year; it is popular with parents and is exceptionally well placed to become an even better school.

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

- Make greater use of the outstanding teachers within the school to share best practice, particularly in relation to teaching techniques that encourage active participation and enjoyment amongst students.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

Standards have been steadily rising for a number of years. From a starting point of average in Year 7, standards rise to above average by the end of Year 9, representing outstanding progress. In 2006, student achievement was so good by Year 9 that it placed the school in the top 5% nationally. In all three core subjects, students exceeded the very challenging targets that were set for them. In 2006, the very high performance achieved in English over recent years was maintained and the performance in mathematics and science improved markedly. From Years 10 to 11, progress is good and by the end of Year 11, the percentage of students who achieve five or more A\* to C grades is above the national average. Students currently in Years 10 and 11 have built upon their exceptional performance in Years 7 to 9 and are performing far above the challenging targets that have been set for them. This represents outstanding achievement throughout the school. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make similar progress to other students and no groups of students underachieve; virtually all students achieve five GCSE grade A\* to G.

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

### **Grade: 1**

Students develop into very well-rounded and mature young people. Their respect for each other is exemplary and they have a particularly caring attitude towards younger students and those less fortunate than themselves. There is a 'family' feel to the school and students develop a very good understanding of the effect that their words and actions have on others, so that behaviour is excellent. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They develop strong moral values through interaction with others and by exploring the points of view of other religions, communities and cultures. Whole-school assemblies add another important spiritual dimension because they have real meaning for the students, who participate fully.

Students are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They enjoy learning and feel that they are well supported by the teachers. They are proud of their achievements and there is real culture of 'doing your best'. Students are very aware of the need to stay healthy and a high proportion join in extra-curricular sport or fitness programmes. Students feel safe. The fact that they can turn to fellow students as well as to all adults for help boosts their confidence.

Students make an outstanding contribution to their school community. Students at all levels are happy to take on responsibilities. They are rightly proud of the improvements to the school environment and to their learning experience that they have set in motion. Students' social

skills and their ability to work well independently, coupled with their outstanding achievement in English and mathematics, prepare them exceptionally well for future education and work.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 1**

Students learn exceptionally well as a result of the consistent and well-structured approach to teaching. Teachers have detailed knowledge of their subjects and the requirements of courses. They use this to prepare schemes and lessons which are carefully designed to help students to make progress. Parents comment favourably on the enthusiasm of teachers for their subjects and how this promotes students' enjoyment.

Students know what they are expected to do and learn in each lesson because teachers share this information at the start. Varied activities keep students engaged and interested, while homework consistently complements work in lessons. Students greatly value the extra time teachers spend out of lessons to help them with their work. Some lessons, for example in religious education, are inspirational, but there are lessons where teachers talk too much and do not fully engage with students. Nevertheless, students' learning is outstanding overall. This is because the key elements of highly effective planning, rigorous monitoring of student performance using very challenging targets and the students' superb attitude and behaviour are a constant throughout the school.

Students know what their targets are, the level they are working at and what they need to do to improve further. Assessment practice in some subjects, such as science, is exemplary. There is a well-established and rigorous monitoring system which rapidly identifies areas for improvement. Teachers are encouraged to develop their practice and share expertise. A newly developed strategy to share the very best practice through coaching demonstrates the school's commitment to further raising the quality of teaching and learning.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

Students benefit from a good curriculum that provides them with a broad and balanced experience. The curriculum meets all national requirements and the school has made links with a local further education college in order to provide enrichment courses for some students. In addition to the usual range of GCSE qualifications, the school also offers a limited number of vocational courses. The school's designation as a specialist technology college has been a catalyst for the development of a range of business links throughout the curriculum.

Inevitably in a small school, the range of options is limited. The school has made every effort to compensate by, for example, developing computer-based courses such as business studies which enable students to work independently, thus enabling additional courses to be offered.

The school provides an extensive range of activities outside of lessons, with, for example, very high numbers learning a musical instrument and participating in sports clubs. Parents are delighted with the new interests their sons and daughters have developed as a result.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support that students receive from the school are outstanding. An extremely thorough induction programme enables the school to identify individual needs and be well prepared for any possible problems. Older students are involved in helping the younger ones settle in. Staff keep detailed records of students' attainment and progress so that extra help or more challenging work can be provided swiftly. This has the result of stretching students at all levels. The support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is also very good. Teachers give students a clear idea of how well they are doing, for example, the grade or level at which they are working, and what they need to do to improve. Students are given the opportunity to plan their own work independently and in most subjects are fully involved in the assessment process. All these measures make important contributions to the outstanding achievement of all students.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 1

The impact of the outstanding leadership and management can be seen most clearly in the exceptional progress made by students. This achievement is brought about by a relentless focus on raising achievement and very close monitoring of the work of students. It would be wrong to assume that this focus on academic success is at the expense of care and support. On the contrary, the leadership team have fostered a community where learners are thoroughly taught, rigorously monitored, consistently challenged and given a wholesome and rich experience. Leaders throughout the school have high expectations and apply school policies rigorously. The senior leaders have put in place a very robust system for checking the performance and well-being of students; it is this, together with the remarkable consistency that has been achieved, that has led to the significant improvements made since the previous inspection. The senior leadership team, including the governing body, have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and take determined action wherever necessary. The governing body are highly supportive and well informed yet provide a suitable challenge where necessary. The track record of continuous improvement over recent years seen in the outstanding achievement in Years 7 to 9 and the marked increase in the numbers of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE is clear evidence of outstanding leadership and management. However, despite the outstanding provision, the leadership know that South Molton can be even better. There is no complacency and the effectiveness of leadership throughout the school means that there is outstanding capacity to continue to improve.

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## Annex A

## 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>
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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>	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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>	1
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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**

My colleagues and I greatly enjoyed spending time in your school. Thank you all very much for the open and frank way that you spoke to us.

Many of your parents and carers responded to a confidential questionnaire and we also took your views and concerns into account when making our judgements. You told us about the things you like, what you feel the school does well and the improvements that have resulted from the technology college status that your school has. I encourage you to read the report, but this letter is to let you know what your school does well and what would help it to be even better.

We think that South Molton is a wonderful school. The results that you achieve are above the national average at GCSE and during your time at the school you make outstanding progress. This is a result of hard work from both you and all the school's staff. There is a real sense of community in the school and we were particularly impressed with the way that everyone gets on so well with each other. You are outstandingly well cared for and for a small school there are lots of things for you to do. It is important for schools to work with the local community so that you can gain experiences that will help you after you leave school; this is something that your school does particularly well. We think that the standard of teaching is outstanding overall. We saw some excellent lessons where you were really actively involved. All your teachers plan your lessons well and tell you your grades and what you need to do to improve. Knowing exactly what you need to do to improve is one of the secrets of your success. We would like the school to try and make more of your lessons as good as the very best ones. The school is exceptionally well run and the principal and senior members of staff are all totally committed to ensuring that each one of you does your very best. You all play your part in making South Molton such a superb school. It is your behaviour and positive attitude that make such a difference!

Once again, thank you all very much for talking to us. I wish you every success in the future.