



The Park Community School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113514
Local Authority Devon
Inspection number 289661
Inspection date 23 November 2006
Reporting inspector Ian Hodgkinson

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Park Lane
School category	Community		Barnstaple
Age range of pupils	11–16		EX32 9AX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01271 373131
Number on roll (school)	1420	Fax number	01271 373167
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Vacant Position
		Headteacher	David Atton
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2002		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–16	23 November 2006	289661

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a very large specialist technology school. A very small proportion of students are from minority ethnic groups but very few speak English as an additional language. The attainment of students on joining the school is broadly average. However, the proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average and a high proportion of these have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Nine students are in public care.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that is well led and managed. The headteacher and senior leadership team have put in place very effective and manageable structures that ensure that students from across a very broad ability range achieve well. Since the last inspection, standards have risen strongly across all years and students' attainment at GCSE is now above average. Good teaching and learning are underpinned by careful assessments of students which ensure that work they are given is mostly well matched to their capabilities. Academic guidance is good. A good, broad curriculum, supplemented by an extensive range of enrichment activities, offers real challenge to higher attaining students who make very good progress. The school's comprehensive support for lower attaining students and those with learning difficulties or disabilities ensures that they too make very good progress relative to their starting points. Very few students leave without passing at least five GCSEs and almost none leaves without a qualification. Progress for those in the middle of the attainment range, while good overall, is not as consistently strong as that of other groups. There have been some weaknesses, for example, in the success of middle attainers in securing GCSE mathematics at grade C or above. This serves to explain why the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, inclusive of mathematics and English, key qualifications for many careers, remains broadly average.

Students' personal development is good. They make an outstanding contribution to the work of the school and wider community. Students have been fully involved, for example, in making decisions about how to promote healthy eating in the school, and subsequent changes in the canteen provision have been very successful. Together with their high degree of participation in an extensive programme of sport and physical activity, students have an excellent awareness about how to stay healthy. Most behave well and feel safe and secure in school. The school offers an outstanding package of care for more vulnerable students. Comprehensive measures are in place to promote better attendance from the significant minority of students with poor records of coming to school. However, attendance remains stubbornly low for a significant minority and adversely affects their achievement at school.

The acquisition of a specialist designation in technology has supported significant improvements in teaching and learning. There has been substantial improvement in the way that information and communication technology (ICT) is used by teachers and students. Specialist status has also further extended the excellent partnerships that the school has with schools, colleges and other organisations. Parents and students speak very highly, for example, of the degree of cooperation with feeder primary schools to promote a smooth transition for students between Years 6 and 7. The school's good improvement since the last inspection is the result of very effective strategic planning by the senior leadership team which is informed by thorough and accurate self-evaluation. Governors play an exceptionally strong role in supporting and scrutinising the school's development. The school has a good capacity to improve further. It has been particularly successful since the last inspection in improving the progress students make in English, mathematics and science between Years 7 and 9.

However, in these years, there is too much inconsistency between subjects in the quality and regularity of homework and marking.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above inclusive of mathematics and English.
- Improve attendance rates.
- Ensure that all the homework set for students in Years 7 to 9 is planned effectively, set regularly and marked constructively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students achieve well. Standards in the Year 9 national tests have risen from below average to above average since the last inspection. Students' test results in 2005 represented very strong progress given their starting points. Standards have continued to rise for Year 11 students too, and are now above average. Students take more GCSEs at The Park than in other schools and their total GCSE score is better than average. Higher attainers make very good progress, and in mathematics and science subjects they record a high proportion of top grades A and A*. Lower attainers also make very good progress. Almost all of them leave with a qualification and a high proportion gets five or more GCSE passes. However, the proportion gaining five or more GCSE passes at grade C and above, inclusive of mathematics and English, remains broadly average. This has largely been because of a weakness in middle attainers' success in mathematics, so that in 2005 too few students who had attained broadly average levels in mathematics when they were in Year 9 did not get a GCSE in mathematics at grade C or above. The school's own evaluation identified the need to improve performance in this area. Consequent changes to the mathematics GCSE curriculum, allowing more regular and rigorous monitoring of students' progress, were successful in raising middle attainers' results in 2006. Ensuring early and effective intervention to further improve the progress of this group remains a priority for the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

'My child has been much more confident since being at Park' was the view of one parent which echoed the opinions of others. A high level of participation in the wide range of activities on offer at the school helps to develop such confidence among students. It also contributes to students' outstandingly positive attitudes towards healthy living. They take full advantage of the opportunities to get involved in making decisions about the way the school is run, such as through school and house councils and through other consultative committees. Their involvement extends well beyond the school itself through extensive charity and community work. Through these activities and through working links with local businesses, students develop good skills

for later life. Their literacy and numeracy skills develop well and they have extensive opportunities to develop their good ICT skills to help them learn and solve problems.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There are positive relationships between staff and students throughout the school. Most students behave well. The challenging behaviour of a minority of students is well managed and students feel safe. Although exclusions are high, they are only used after careful consideration. The great majority of students attend regularly, but attendance rates are below average because of the persistent low attendance of a minority of students. The school does as much as it can and deploys a considerable amount of resources to support and engage these students in education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers use assessment information carefully to ensure that work is well matched to students' capabilities and to their preferred ways of learning. Teachers work effectively with teaching assistants to support students with learning difficulties in class. The basic literacy skills of students with learning difficulties are also supported very well when they are withdrawn from class for specially targeted individual and group work. More generally, students' skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are being well developed across subjects as a result of careful planning of schemes of work arising from an analysis of students' strengths and weaknesses. In Years 7 to 9, however, not all subjects plan and mark homework carefully or set it regularly enough to extend students' learning.

Students appreciate the variety of methods that teachers use to make learning enjoyable. Very good resources are available to make lessons exciting, for example the wide availability of ICT equipment, a well furnished learning resources centre and high quality facilities for games and physical education.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers its students a very broad curriculum, which is enriched by an extensive programme of curricular and extra-curricular activities. The curriculum is particularly broad for students in Years 10 and 11 who take a relatively high number of GCSEs across a wide range of compulsory and optional subjects. Their total GCSE results are therefore well above average, although the average proportion gaining GCSEs at grade C or above in mathematics and English raises a question about whether some students are able to give these core subjects enough attention. Students and parents, however, are not concerned about being overburdened; the school's research indicates that they favour being able to take a range of the subjects they enjoy, and pass rates continue to increase. The flexibility of the curriculum, including the offer of 'twilight' lessons and distance learning programmes, allows higher attainers to take still more subjects

to extend their interests. For younger students, the school plans its mathematics and English curriculum with partner primary schools to ensure a very smooth transition for students between Year 6 and Year 7. This has contributed significantly to the rise in standards across Years 7 to 9. Good provision is made to extend the learning of gifted and talented students through the offer of challenging programmes of activities in and out of class. The exceptionally broad programme of extra-curricular activities also supports students' personal development very well. The school, however, does not meet statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall. Academic support and guidance are good. Subjects are making increasingly effective use of assessment information to determine when to intervene to support students at risk of underachieving. The school recognises that continued rigour in this area is the key to raising pass rates at grade C and above in English and mathematics. Students themselves feel well supported by a house system which operates in units small enough to ensure a high level of personal care and attention from staff. Targets for achievement, however, are not, always made clear enough for students and so this diminishes the impact that they might make on motivating students to do even better. There are, for example, some weaknesses in the targets for general improvement set in contact books, in teachers' comments in marking in Years 7 to 9, and in students' awareness of examination targets in Year 11.

The school offers exceptional standards of care to its most vulnerable students, who achieve well as a result. It works intensively with external agencies to support the achievement, behaviour, attendance and welfare of students facing the greatest barriers to learning, either through their social circumstances or through learning difficulties and disabilities. It has invested heavily in its own specialist centres of student support, and in establishing a team of learning mentors and an in-house social worker who successfully liaise with students and their families to keep students on track.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior leadership team have provided the school with a very good sense of direction that has guided the school since the last inspection. The school's acquisition of specialist college status, and the partnerships this has created, has contributed to significant improvements in resources and in approaches to teaching and learning. The school has continued to grow and expand. Skilful leadership has ensured that effective structures are in place, including regular consultation with students, parents and partners, to maintain very good communication throughout. School self-evaluation is thorough and accurate and has been strengthened considerably by detailed and regular subject reviews. Teachers at all levels are involved in evaluating the work of subject departments as an effective means of encouraging staff to reflect on the quality of work and share ideas. At subject level, however, the quality of

improvement planning in response to monitoring and evaluation lacks a sharp focus on standards. There is not clear enough reference to criteria against which the success of actions can be judged, especially in terms of their impact on standards.

Governors know the school exceptionally well. They make it their business to find out about the strengths of the school and the challenges it faces by regular visits to the school and meetings with students and staff. The governing body has a very good range of skills and experience, which it uses to outstanding effect in scrutinising the work of the school and in supporting many key developments.

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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?	1
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	2

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	3
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	1
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	1
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

Many thanks for the welcome you gave to us when we visited the school for its recent inspection. We appreciated hearing your views about the school and reading those of your parents.

Like you, we think that The Park is a good school. We were impressed by the way it has continued to improve since it was last inspected more than four years ago. This is a clear indication that the school is led and managed well by the headteacher and leadership team. They have the support of an excellent governing body. Together with the staff, they have brought about new developments in the school, such as the acquisition of specialist technology status, which have helped standards to rise. GCSE results are above average and reflect the good progress students make. A good curriculum really stretches the most able pupils among you, and the school offers good care and support to others, especially to those who find learning difficult, to help them achieve well.

Teachers assess your attainment carefully to help them to teach you well. They make sure that work is well suited to your abilities and preferred ways of working. You and your parents made it clear to us how well the school works with local primary schools to make sure that you settle into the school well when you arrive in Year 7 and build on what you have already learned. You go on to develop well as individuals. In particular, many of you make an outstanding contribution to the work of the school and community. You also take full advantage of the many clubs and activities offered by the school and develop some excellent attitudes to healthy lifestyles.

There are some ways in which the school can get even better. Firstly, we think it is important for more students to get GCSEs at grade C and above in both mathematics and English, as these are so important for the future careers of many. Secondly, the attendance of some students needs to improve considerably if they are to achieve their potential. Finally, we think that pupils in Years 7 to 9 need to have homework set and marked more regularly in some subjects. You can help in some of these by working hard at your mathematics and English and by making sure you attend regularly.