

South Dartmoor Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113519
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	289664
Inspection dates	2–3 May 2007
Reporting inspector	David Townsend HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1659
6th form	296
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	M J Billington
Headteacher	R B Tarleton
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2003
School address	Balland Lane Ashburton Newton Abbot TQ13 7EW
Telephone number	01364 652230
Fax number	01364 654069

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This is a rural school which is much larger than average. It also has a large sixth form. The school has both specialist sports college status and is a Training School with Leading Edge status. Students travel to the school from across a wide geographical area. The number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is low and the number for whom English is an additional language is below average.

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 and improving school, with many outstanding features. The vision of an organisation dedicated to promoting collaborative learning by students and adults alike is well reflected in the outstanding curriculum and care, guidance and support for students. Teachers get many opportunities to lead curriculum innovation and, in turn, enrich learning for students. The sixth form is outstanding.

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. The following comment from a student, typical of many, demonstrates how much they value the college: 'There is a great sense of community in this school and it really helps us build our self-esteem.' The students live healthy lives, feel safe and are themselves safety conscious. They contribute much to their own community. The college successfully provides many opportunities for students to work collaboratively and learn more about themselves as young people.

Achievement is good. Pupils enter the school with standards that are broadly average. Test and GCSE results fell in 2006 and standards, whilst higher in previous years, were average. Results in the national tests indicate that students make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 9 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science but good progress across the wider curriculum. Despite the dip in 2006, they make good progress by the end of Year 11. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers generally use their subject expertise skilfully to plan work which meets the needs of students. However, it is inconsistent. Whilst some practice is outstanding, there are also lessons in which students make slower progress, especially a small minority of boys who display less positive attitudes to learning.

The outstanding curriculum on offer to students is critical to the college's success. Through its specialist sports college status and the excellent links with partners that have been fostered regionally, nationally and abroad, it provides students with a rich diet of learning opportunities within and beyond the college day through which to develop a range of personal qualities and leadership skills. This curriculum is flexible and closely tailored to learners' specific needs and aptitudes.

Exemplary leadership and management are critical factors in the college's success and are reflected in the substantial improvements made since the last inspection. Governors are well informed; they are rigorous in challenging and monitoring the college and carry out their statutory duties very well. This forward thinking school works closely with the National College for Leadership and takes a leading role in training and assessing future school leaders. Under the principal's outstanding leadership, South Dartmoor is enhancing the life chances of young people and has excellent capacity to sustain its development.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding. Standards are above average and students achieve very well in the majority of subjects. They enjoy the college and are very good ambassadors for it. Leadership and management are outstanding because school leaders provide very clear direction and open up new possibilities for students. The outstanding curriculum is broad, rich and enhanced by excellent new facilities for learning. For example, this year, the college is offering the BTEC National Diploma in Sport. There are many opportunities for students to become involved in the wider life of the college through subject-related activities, events and visits and a host of

sporting options being readily available. This, together with an active programme of sixth form tutoring for younger students in personal, social and health education, science and English, enables many students to put something back into the community and contributes to their outstanding personal development and well-being. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good and expectations are high. Students' progress is regularly monitored and there is an effective staged intervention programme if learners are underachieving, together with clear guidance through the 'Way Ahead' scheme on how to improve performance. Students truly appreciate their academic and pastoral support. As one student put it, 'Nothing is too much trouble. They really care that choices you make are right for you.'

What the school should do to improve further

Improve standards and achievement by raising all teaching to the level of the best

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement over time is good. However, standards in 2006 were average. The school focuses successfully on raising the attainment of average and below average students in Years 7 to 9 so that most achieve the nationally expected level in English and mathematics by the end of Year 9, thereby providing a solid foundation for their later success in the GCSE examinations. Progress in the core subjects, as shown by the national tests, whilst good over time, dropped slightly in 2006 and was satisfactory. Results in the national tests indicate that students make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 9 in the core subjects but good progress across the wider curriculum and especially in art, music and physical education (PE). A large number of students also take national tests in mathematics in Year 8, a year earlier than usual.

GCSE results in 2006 fell to around the national average, having been consistently above for the last few years. Students made outstanding progress in English and good progress in most other subjects, including mathematics, but performance in science was the lowest of the core subjects. Students achieved particularly well in 2006 at GCSE level in art, design and technology, drama, music, religious studies and media studies. Girls did better than boys, of whom a small but significant number underachieved.

Currently, most students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, are making at least good progress, as shown by their work in lessons and by the college's tracking of their progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students are proud of their school and thoroughly enjoy their education. The school has a very well established culture of healthy eating. The take-up of sporting activities by those of all abilities in this specialist status sporting college ensures an exceptionally strong adoption of healthy lifestyles. Students feel safe and have complete confidence that any concerns they may have will be dealt with effectively by the staff. They know they can also draw on the help of those students, trained in a variety of roles, who provide strong peer support. The great majority of students behave very well and

act safely and responsibly in lessons and around the school. Instances of poor behaviour, when they occur, are handled very effectively. Recently, attendance rates have been broadly average. The school is working vigorously to improve these rates and this year's rates are improving.

Exemplary progress is made in developing in each student, the personal qualities needed to confidently contribute to the community and for their working roles. Many students choose to serve on one of the range of elected student councils. The student body is confident, independent and articulate, willing and ready to take on responsibilities and leadership roles because they have had considerable involvement in a wide range of activities at local, national and international level. These include performances, charity events, sports festivals and competitions.

Learners' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is very strong. Cultural development, in particular, is promoted by the school's outstanding international links. Workplace skills are very well developed through work-related learning programmes and collaboration with business partners.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good and students make good progress as a result. Lessons are well planned. The work matches learners' needs well and teachers use their subject expertise to good effect to offer clear explanations and to develop students' knowledge and understanding. The most successful lessons are noted for the high expectations teachers have of students, the strong focus on learning and the more rapid progress students make. Opportunities for independent and collaborative learning abound, and what constitutes high quality work is made clear to students. In these lessons, there is good behaviour and there are productive working relationships. Students are clear about assessment procedures and know how to improve their own work. Excellent examples were seen in the use of comprehensive peer assessment in PE and the successful way in which music boosted students' self-esteem. Where lessons are less successful, time is not used well and low level disruption inhibits progress.

Strategies to meet the needs of all students, including gifted and talented, are implemented well by all departments and teaching assistants are deployed effectively to meet the needs of individuals and groups of learners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The college provides an outstanding curriculum for its students and opens horizons for all. As a specialist sports college, South Dartmoor offers an exemplary range of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities for students, especially in sport and the performing arts. The school embraces initiatives with enthusiasm and has secured national recognition for its curriculum development. For example, there are strong examples of the way aspects of PE and sport act as a context for cross-curricular work, such as the 'Onside Partnership', through which students explore how artistic creativity might be expressed physically. The curriculum is very well matched to learners' aptitudes and interests. Students are offered choices in what to study early in their

time in Key Stage 3, 'fast track' and study extension projects are available to able students and individualised programmes are devised for those learners at risk of disaffection. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and make good progress. At both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, there is an excellent programme of vocational and applied courses and these have a strong take-up. The school has won awards for its strong work-related learning curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. There is a strong commitment amongst the staff to promote the health and safety of students, who in turn recognise that they are all well cared for and appreciate the strong support they receive. Arrangements for health and safety and the safeguarding of children are robust and secure.

There are excellent systems for transition and a highly effective tutorial system across the college. Benefits include the close friendships that arise and the way in which older students take an active role in promoting the welfare of younger students. The success with which the college manages students' initial transition from Year 6 to 7 helps build a firm foundation on which students progress successfully through the college. Vulnerable and underperforming students are quickly recognised and given appropriate support. A notable feature is the way in which data are vigorously used within both departments and performance teams to track all students through the college and to set challenging targets. Students are aware of their current standards and what they need to do to improve. There are also several opportunities to discuss progress and aspirations so that students are well prepared for the various stages in their lives. Liaison with parents, carers, the local authority and other agencies are very effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal provides exemplary leadership, ably assisted by a strong deputy and a highly effective leadership team. They have successfully united staff, parents and students behind their vision of South Dartmoor as a learning organisation. Their impact is seen in the many outstanding facets of the school's performance, such as the curriculum and students' personal development and well-being. Senior leaders have successfully developed the capacity of leadership at all levels to analyse performance with accuracy so that the right improvement priorities are identified. Their self-evaluation is accurate and insightful and forms the basis for the instigation of well judged strategies for improvement. The college's specialist sports status has been a powerful catalyst for improvement. The opportunity it brings has helped the college successfully promote with students the importance of developing a range of personal qualities and of becoming independent, thoughtful learners.

A high priority is also given to professional development. At this Training School, advanced skills teachers and middle managers work well strategically to support all teachers, including trainees new to the profession, in researching and sharing good practice as teachers and leaders both within and beyond the college. Teachers are successfully encouraged to reflect on their

practice and to innovate in order to inspire students and offer them enhanced choice in what and how they learn.

Leadership and management at all levels ensure the college runs very smoothly and the momentum for change and expansion continues efficiently. Financial management is very effective and enables the college to continue developing first rate facilities for all students. Planning for future development is ambitious.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	2
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

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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

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

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	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	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

4 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of South Dartmoor Community College, Newton Abbot, Devon TQ13 7EW

Thank you very much for the welcome that you gave us when we recently visited your college. We were very impressed by how politely, confidently and articulately you made your comments and contributions, which really helped us make our decisions. You have obvious pride in your college and rightly so. Yours is a good school with many outstanding features. These are the things we particularly liked:

- The outstanding curriculum and how being a specialist sports college has led to wonderful opportunities, not just within sports but other disciplines, too, such as the performing arts.
- The excellent sixth form.
- You are given very good opportunities to help make decisions, to take on leadership roles and make a personal contribution to life in the college community.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Staff are dedicated to ensuring you receive excellent pastoral care and guidance with your work.

Even in a college with as many good and outstanding qualities as yours, there is more that can be improved. Although teaching and learning in the school are good overall and sometimes outstanding, they are not consistent. We have asked your teachers to reflect together on how to ensure even more lessons are of the highest quality, so that all of you are fully engaged and make the best use of valuable teaching time. You can help your school to become even better by continuing to seek to become independent and thoughtful learners.

Yours sincerely

David Townsend Her Majesty's Inspector