



South Axholme Community School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118094
Local Authority North Lincolnshire
Inspection number 291020
Inspection dates 23–24 November 2006
Reporting inspector Marianne Young

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Burnham Road
School category	Community		Epworth, Doncaster
Age range of pupils	11–16		South Yorkshire, DN9 1BY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01427 872121
Number on roll (school)	963	Fax number	01427 875028
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Paul Barratt
		Headteacher	Mr Malcolm Toms
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	23–24 November 2006	291020

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

South Axholme is an average size comprehensive school situated in the small town of Epworth in North Lincolnshire. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who have a statement of special educational need exceeds the national average. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds and none for whom English is an additional language. Almost all students are White British. The number of students entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The school's specialist status as a performing arts college, which it has held since 2000, was re-awarded in 2005. Artsmark Gold, Investors in People status and the Healthy Schools Award are also held by the school. Most pupils arrive by school buses due to the fact that the school is quite isolated geographically.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

South Axholme is a good school with some outstanding features. The school is over-subscribed and popular with parents. Students clearly enjoy their education very much and the vast majority of parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Two parents summed up the view of many when they commented, 'Since starting school my daughter has become excited about school' and 'the ethos of the school is all about the child and their well-being'. The school and especially the headteacher, work hard to create a climate in which all students are valued and able to achieve successfully. Students' response is clearly evident in their enthusiasm for all opportunities provided, either in the classroom or through enrichment activities, and the way many of them spoke to inspectors praising life at school.

The majority of students enter the school with levels of attainment that are just above average. By the end of Key Stage 3, most students achieve standards that are above the average nationally. However, there has been underachievement in English, particularly by boys, for several years. The school has recognised this and taken urgent action to improve standards in this subject. The results which students attain at Key Stage 4 are well above those expected nationally. In 2006, there was a significant improvement in the performance of boys where they closed the gap between themselves and girls at A* to C level. The school sets challenging targets and regularly reviews them, often upwards, during the year. The great majority of students achieve the qualifications they need to move on to further education or training. The school, therefore, not only raises students' aspirations, but provides most students with the tools to achieve them.

There is a happy atmosphere around the school. Behaviour is generally excellent. Students talk with confidence and they appreciate the efforts made by their teachers. Personal development, the curriculum and the care, guidance and support given to students are all outstanding. The school knows its students well, enabling all to flourish. Systems underpinning the support and guidance given to all students are secure, often involving a range of external agencies with many staff going the extra mile for their students. The curriculum developments already in place for students beyond the age of 14 demonstrate that the school wishes to be at the cutting edge of curriculum developments nationally and works successfully to negate any potential problems associated with its isolated location.

Teaching and learning are good, although not all work is well matched to the needs of all students. Some lessons do not enable students to be fully involved in their own learning. Suitable training has been provided to extend the understanding and skills of middle managers when they are monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision, especially teaching and learning, in their subject areas. However, inspectors agree with the school that the performance of some curriculum areas and middle managers remains too uneven in quality and inconsistent in practice. However, overall leadership and management are good. Governors are well informed, loyal supporters of the school, but do not shirk their responsibility to provide challenge when necessary.

The recent re-designation of the school's specialist performing arts status was managed very effectively and the school exceeded all its 2006 performance targets. The specialist status has a positive impact on the school's curriculum and extra-curricular activities; for instance, through an increased choice of subjects and options as well as dance and music projects with local primary schools. The improvements already achieved and the way the school has tackled areas for development over time demonstrate that the school is well placed to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make monitoring systems more robust and clarify expectations and accountability for middle managers.
- Improve the teaching that is simply satisfactory so that a higher proportion is good or better.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards in national tests at KS3 and GCSE are above average. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making the same progress as others. Provisional results in the Year 9 national tests in 2006 were above average, with students achieving particularly well in science. Standards in mathematics were sustained, but results in English, especially at the higher levels, were not good enough given students' attainment on entry.

Students continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11 with GCSE results improving over the last three years. Standards have been consistently well above average, especially in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In 2006, the gap between boys' and girls' attainment closed significantly. This improvement is due to several factors; for instance, the support given to all students to help them with coursework and revision. The close monitoring and support given to those students at risk of underperforming is another significant factor in their improved achievement. The success of these strategies is evident. The 2006 GCSE results are the best ever achieved by the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Attendance levels are high; pupils arrive punctually to their lessons. Behaviour around the school is excellent and students cope well with rather cramped conditions in the dining areas and in some corridors. This is just one example of how well students consider the safety of others in lessons and around the school. Other than on a few occasions where teaching fails to capture students' interest, behaviour in lessons is also excellent. Social and moral development is outstanding and their cultural development is good. In comparison, their spiritual development is not as strong partly because opportunities

are missed, such as reflection at the start of the day. However, students told inspectors how much they enjoy and appreciate it when their peers play music during assemblies and lunchtime, many lingering over lunch in order to listen. Students know how to work safely and have a well developed understanding of the way in which physical activity and diet contribute to a healthy lifestyle. The school council work effectively to improve the quality of school life on behalf of their fellow students and mentors are proud of the role they play in support of younger students. Many students regularly get involved in local community activities and they describe enthusiastically events in which they have been involved. This work, together with the very good take up for post-16 courses, contributes significantly so that students develop into mature, confident young people, well prepared for life in the adult world.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students' very positive attitudes help them to learn well. During paired observations of lessons between inspectors and senior managers a range of strengths and areas for development were seen and agreed. In most lessons visited by inspectors, students were diligent, displaying enthusiasm when responding to teachers' probing questions. Most students and teachers keenly use a range of technologies; for instance, laptop computers in mathematics lessons to help them understand new concepts. The best lessons are well planned. They include a variety of tasks enabling teachers to assess effectively exactly what students have learnt and what they need to do to improve. Some teachers use the ends of lessons well for this; however, too often lessons end abruptly with no time to sum up and evaluate learning. Also, where teaching is less effective, marking is too variable and planning minimal. On a few occasions, all students were given the same work to do regardless of their different abilities. In some lessons, teachers talk to the students for too long before getting them actively involved in learning. Consequently, students became passive listeners, were insufficiently motivated and a few instances of inattention and chatter were seen. These lessons contrasted markedly with those where teachers built on and developed students' enthusiasm and willingness to work hard.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum and range of enrichment activities for its students. All statutory requirements are met and the curriculum for those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is especially well planned. Aware of shortcomings identified in the last inspection report, the school has reviewed its provision, taking into account views of students and parents. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum is broad and balanced and supplemented by an exciting range of activities, which support learning outside the classroom. This enrichment continues into Years

10 and 11. These activities are appreciated by many parents, one of whom commented, 'Opportunities for educational visits are exceptional'.

In recognition of the school's specialist status, all students study an arts subject at GCSE level and attainment in these subjects is consistently above average. The issue of boys' underachievement is being successfully tackled with the introduction of a more suitable range of optional subjects. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is not yet fully developed but is being pursued energetically by the school. The very successful well-established links with local colleges ensure that students can continue studying many subjects at a higher level beyond the age of 16. Many students take part in the very wide range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school notably, but not exclusively, in the areas of performing arts and sports. The school organises and funds late buses so that students can stay after school and participate. Specialist status enables strong curriculum links to be developed with primary schools. Several students described enthusiastically how much they enjoy working regularly with pupils from local primary schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support provided for students is outstanding. The comment by an older student that, 'teachers don't give up on you' effectively summarises the excellent quality of care, guidance and support which this school provides for its students. This is underpinned by the strength of relationships which exist between teachers and students, recognised and appreciated by students and their parents. Consequently, students feel happy and safe in school. They are confident that on the rare occasions when bullying occurs, it is dealt with speedily and effectively. Students also appreciate the effectiveness and high quality of arrangements for them to move on into appropriate further education, training or the world of work at the age of 16. The robust tracking systems of students' progress enable staff to identify quickly any in danger of underachieving. Procedures for safeguarding students meet current government requirements. Particularly good and sometimes innovative arrangements have been implemented to ensure that the most vulnerable students, for example those at risk of exclusion, attend well and continue to achieve as well as their peers. The school's work in this area is enhanced by effective liaison with a broad range of outside agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management of the school, including its governance, are good. The leadership of the headteacher and his senior leadership team is strong. The school's vision and steady improvement in standards, especially at Key Stage 4, are the result of commitment of senior managers to ensure that all students reach their potential. Senior managers have an accurate view of the school's main strengths and constantly seek further improvements sharing these with all staff. However, because there is

inconsistency in the quality and rigour of monitoring, self-review and accountability at middle management level, not all students' learning is always as effective as it could be. The voluntary wider leadership group is providing good opportunities for teachers' professional development as managers. Its members are pleased to have been responsible for new initiatives to move the school forward; such as review days which it is anticipated will replace parents' evenings. School and subject development plans accurately identify areas for improvement, although some departments do not give sufficient weight to raising students' standards and achievement even further. The use of data for the tracking of students' progress is developing well.

The school is very committed to educational inclusion. Strong pastoral systems promote first-class personal development and contribute very well to an ethos which encourages mutual support and respect and ensures that most learning is effective and rewarding. Governors are experienced, know the school very well and provide good support and challenge for the headteacher. The management of finances, staffing and resources is very effective, despite the limitations of some accommodation. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been good and the senior team has good capacity to bring about the further improvements required.

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.

Inspection judgements

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

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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.

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	3
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

South Axholme Community School

Burnham Road

Epworth

North Lincolnshire

DN9 1BY

27 November 2006

Dear Students

Thank you for the courtesy and welcome you extended to me and my colleagues during our recent visit. We appreciated the time many of you gave to talk to us about your work and the various activities available to you outside lessons. It was very clear that you enjoy school very much. A very large number of your parents also completed a questionnaire to give us their views of the school. This was most helpful, so please pass on my thanks to them.

We found that South Axholme is a good school with a number of really outstanding features. Your headteacher knows you all very well and together with all staff he works very hard to provide the many good things that help you develop academically and personally. Because the vast majority of you work very hard, you achieve high standards by the end of Year 11 which helps most of you to continue studying at local colleges. The curriculum and the care, guidance and support you receive to help you all achieve your full potential are outstanding. We agree with many of you, and your parents, that the teachers in the school 'do not give up on you'.

We have asked the headteacher and staff to do two things to improve your education further.

- Improve the ways in which each department checks how well it is doing.
- Ensure that more lessons are taught well or even better.

We wish everyone associated with the school continued success.

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young

Her Majesty's Inspector