

Devonport High School for Boys

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113530
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	311308
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2007
Reporting inspector	David Humphries HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	1121
6th form	269
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Charles Evans
Headteacher	N M Pettit
Date of previous school inspection	20 October 2003
School address	Paradise Road Stoke Plymouth PL1 5QP
Telephone number	01752 208787
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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

Devonport High School for Boys draws pupils from a wide area extending well beyond Plymouth. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below average although the school's catchment area is not prosperous and nearly a third of sixth form students are entitled to an Education Maintenance Allowance. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic grounds is broadly average, although there are few with a first language other than English. The school has held specialist engineering status for a number of years and has recently been awarded a second specialism in languages. The school works with a consortium of local schools to provide post-16 education and the sixth form includes a small number of girls.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Devonport High School for Boys is a good school with some outstanding features. One parent described how his sons moved on to university '... not only academically well qualified, but also with the personal skills that enabled them to take full advantage of the opportunities arising'. This captures one of the key strengths of the school: its ability to maintain high academic standards while helping pupils to become well-rounded, articulate and confident young adults.

Teaching is good overall and when it is imaginative and challenging, pupils respond enthusiastically and make outstanding progress. However, pupils are less positive about learning and do not make such rapid progress when lessons do not provide sufficient pace or challenge. Consequently, there are marked variations in how well pupils achieve in different subjects. Overall, they make good progress and the standards they reach are very high. The curriculum is good and some recent changes have helped to ensure that it is better matched to pupils' needs and interests. The school makes imaginative use of its specialist status to extend the range of subjects on offer. A rich programme of extra-curricular activities and links with local business and industry provide valuable additional learning opportunities for pupils. The quality of care, guidance and support is good and there are well designed procedures to track pupils' progress and tackle any signs of underachievement.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They have a very clear sense of right and wrong and are eager to contribute to the life of the school and wider community. They are keen to take responsibility and participate enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. They have high aspirations and enjoy their education, particularly when lessons are lively and interactive. One parent wrote, 'My son has matured into a responsible young man under the guidance of the teachers and the independence that they have encouraged.'

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's clear vision for the future of the school is underpinned by a strong commitment to raising achievement. He is well supported by some able senior and middle managers and recent years have seen an increasingly sharp focus on self-evaluation and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Outstanding collaboration with other schools and organisations enhances the quality of education provided by the school and its partners. Governors make an incisive contribution to self-evaluation and are a key factor in the school's good capacity to improve further. The school is held in very high esteem by a substantial majority of parents, although a significant minority are critical of some aspects of its work.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school has a good sixth form with some outstanding features. Most students choose to continue their education in the sixth form. They build successfully on their earlier achievements to make good progress so that the results they attain in A-level examinations are very high, although there are marked variations between subjects. Students greatly enjoy opportunities for independent learning and discussion with each other and with their teachers. Attendance and retention rates are extremely high. The sixth form is well led. The curriculum is outstanding. The school works very effectively with a consortium of local sixth forms to extend the range

of subjects on offer. Where possible, the school provides additional support to enable the most able students to study subjects outside their formal timetable. Students are given helpful advice and guidance, so that they understand clearly what they need to do to improve their work. Sixth formers make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school. They are actively involved in supervision at breaks and lunchtimes and play a leading role in the school's house system. They often provide younger pupils with very positive and supportive role models.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that achievement is high in all subjects by extending the stimulating and challenging classroom practice, which is already evident in some areas, more consistently across the school.
- Further develop the partnership with parents so that all parents are confident about the work of the school and understand how their views are taken into account.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good and standards are exceptionally high, both in the main school and in the sixth form. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is well above average and they make good progress in Years 7 to 9 so that the standards they reach in national tests at age 14 are extremely high. Performance in mathematics and science is consistently very strong. There is some variation in pupils' performance in English from year to year, although the most recent results show a significant improvement. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11 so that their results in GCSE examinations at age 16 are exceptionally high with consistently strong performance in English, mathematics and science. However, there are marked variations in performance between other subjects, particularly in the proportion of pupils attaining the highest grades. Consequently, although test and examination results are very high and mostly in line with the challenging targets set by the school, the proportion of pupils achieving A and A* grades at GCSE in 2007 fell below the target.

Sixth form students continue to make good progress. A-level examination results are exceptionally high, with more than half of the students achieving A or B grades, although there are marked variations between subjects. Students are encouraged and supported to study additional subjects beyond the usual timetabled programme of lessons and there are examples of students attaining as many as six very good A-level passes.

Effective personal support and care enable the few pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils are proud of their school and have a strong sense of identity with its aims and values. Their social, moral, cultural and spiritual development is excellent. They are eager to debate challenging issues and respond very well to opportunities for quiet reflection. Pupils relate extremely well to each other and to adults. They are keen to take on responsibility and support younger boys, for example, through the peer mentoring scheme. The school council plays an

active role in the life of the school: it is involved in staff appointments and played a major part in devising a new school travel plan. Pupils make a substantial contribution to the wider community through support for charity fund raising and working with pupils in primary schools, and they have rewritten a guide for young people in Plymouth. Sixth formers play an important role in this vibrant school community and these thoughtful and erudite students would like to have an even greater say in the development of the school.

The great majority of pupils enjoy their education and behave well. Attendance rates are well above average. Pupils are particularly enthusiastic when provided with challenging and interesting learning activities. In the sixth form there are more frequent opportunities for discussion and independent learning and these are greatly appreciated by students. Pupils act safely, both in lessons and when moving about the many narrow stairways and corridors in the school buildings. They know how to act safely outside school, for example when cycling on busy roads or participating in outdoor activities. They have an excellent understanding of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles and have responded enthusiastically to the healthy eating options in the school refectory. Many are involved in lunchtime sporting activities.

As they move through the school, pupils become increasingly confident and articulate young adults. They develop high level skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology and are very well prepared for further or higher education and future employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers know their pupils well and usually build productive relationships with the classes that they teach. Very good systems to assess and track pupils' progress are used well by most teachers and marking is often thorough and helpful. There are examples of outstanding classroom practice, combining infectious enthusiasm with pace, challenge and a variety of stimulating learning activities. The most effective teachers use excellent questioning to stimulate pupils' thinking and are able to elicit sophisticated, perceptive responses without losing pace or momentum. In these lessons pupils make very impressive progress. However, although it is good overall, the quality of teaching is variable and it is stronger in some subjects than others. When lessons are more mundane and teaching is overly didactic, pupils are less positive about learning and this impedes their progress. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from a well designed programme of interesting and challenging extra-curricular activities. However, in some lessons the most able pupils are not sufficiently stretched.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school uses its specialist status very well to extend the range of subjects on offer, including additional languages such as Mandarin and some imaginative engineering courses which make highly effective use of links with local industry. The main school curriculum has a strong academic focus and meets the needs of the majority of pupils. It is complemented by a programme to develop the literacy, numeracy and work-related skills of pupils who would benefit from following a smaller number of examination courses. The school has recognised that the GCSE courses

followed in a few subjects have not been well matched to pupils' needs and interests, and a number of new courses have been introduced in the current year. The sixth form curriculum is extremely well matched to students' needs and this ensures that the overwhelming majority complete courses successfully and are able to progress to higher education.

The school provides an impressive array of extra-curricular clubs and activities which are greatly appreciated by pupils. The school makes very good use of its residential centre in Brittany to develop pupils' language skills and to gain a broader European perspective. Work experience, careers and enterprise education programmes ensure that pupils are very well prepared for life beyond school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides effective support for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, drawing on the expertise of external agencies when required. Suitable child protection procedures are in place and teachers pay close attention to health and safety issues when planning their lessons. The few cases of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

The school has well designed systems for tracking pupils' academic and personal development and staff intervene promptly when there are any concerns. There are excellent induction arrangements for new pupils and comprehensive guidance is offered when pupils make choices about the courses they will follow in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. There is extremely strong support for sixth form students making university applications. In the great majority of cases the school works very effectively with parents to support their children's education, although a minority are less confident about this aspect of its work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher has worked tirelessly to improve the school, balancing the need to maintain high academic standards with a strong commitment to pupils' broader personal development. His skilful management of resources has facilitated an impressive programme of new building and refurbishment which has greatly enhanced the learning environment. He is well supported by a capable and committed senior leadership team and some able faculty leaders. There is a strong team ethos with a clear focus on raising achievement.

A recently introduced cycle of faculty reviews is enabling senior leaders and governors to make sharper judgements about key aspects of the school's performance, identifying strengths and pinpointing areas for improvement. This highly effective model of self-evaluation is being implemented at an individual subject level. Senior leaders recognise that this is not yet sufficiently well embedded across the school to have a substantial impact on achievement. A programme of training in lesson observations has added rigour and consistency to the school's judgements about the quality of teaching and learning; these are now accurate and perceptive.

Governors make an outstanding contribution to the work of the school. Their involvement in the cycle of faculty reviews is exemplary. They display a keen awareness of the school's strengths

and development priorities, and combine a high level of support with an appropriate degree of challenge.

The majority of parents have a very high regard for the work of the school and are extremely supportive of its work. The Parents, Teachers and Friends Association provides a useful forum for constructive debate about proposed changes. The school works hard to gather the views of a wider cross-section of parents through informal discussions and by distributing questionnaires during parents' evenings. However, despite these efforts, a significant minority of parents are critical of some aspects of the school's work and some are concerned that it does not take sufficient account of their views.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	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?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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

21 September 2007

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Devonport High School for Boys, Plymouth, PL1 5QP

The inspection team enjoyed listening to your views when your school was inspected on 19–20 September 2007. Many of your parents and carers completed a questionnaire to let us know how they felt about the school. I hope you will talk to them about the inspection report because it explains what your school does well and how it can become even better.

Devonport High School for Boys is a good school with some outstanding features. The curriculum is enhanced by very effective use of the school's specialist status and strong partnerships with other schools and organisations. There are well designed systems to track your progress and the school is quick to tackle underachievement. Teachers know you well and want you to succeed. These things combine to help you make good progress, and the academic standards that you reach are very high.

As you move through the school you become confident and articulate young adults, with high aspirations. You are eager to take responsibility and make valuable contributions to the life of the school and wider community. You behave well and enjoy your education. Sixth formers are an asset to the school and often provide younger pupils with supportive and positive role models.

- The school is well led. The headteacher is highly committed to balancing high academic standards with personal and social development. He and his staff have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and are determined to make it even more effective. There are two areas that we have asked them to focus on:
- Although it is good overall, teaching could be more consistently stimulating and challenging. It is important that you respond positively to this type of teaching, because this is when you make the most progress.
- Most parents hold the school in high esteem, but a significant minority are critical of some aspects of its work. The school needs to build a stronger partnership with this group.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Humphries Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

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