

Dulverton Middle and Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123871
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314749
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Anne Looney HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Martin
Headteacher	Steve Ford
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2005
School address	Barns Close West Dulverton TA22 9EE
Telephone number	01398 323223
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Age group	9-13
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Dulverton Middle and Community School is the smallest middle school in Somerset and is situated on the edge of the Exmoor National Park. In April 2007, it became part of a federation with two first schools, one of which is close to the school and one of which is 10 miles away. The federation has one governing body but each school has its own headteacher. The school serves a large, mostly rural catchment area, with some areas of social disadvantage, and many pupils have long journeys to school. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and the vast majority of pupils are of White British background. The school holds an Activities Adventure Licence as part of its work for the Exmoor Curriculum, which is designed to develop pupils' life skills and their understanding of their environmental and cultural heritage.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Dulverton Middle and Community School provides a satisfactory standard of education. The personal development of its pupils is good. Pupils much enjoy school, are articulate and have a strong sense of right and wrong. They relish being active and say that they feel very safe and cared for. The school has an inclusive approach and this is recognised by parents, one of whom reflected feelings generally by writing, 'We really do feel that this is a school where "Every Child Matters".' From their below average standards when they enter, pupils make satisfactory progress over their four years at the school, although standards at the end of Year 6, as measured by the national tests, have been below average. This is particularly the case in mathematics, where they were significantly below average in 2007. School data show that the current Year 6 pupils are on track to make better progress and to meet their realistic targets in both English and mathematics. Although progress is satisfactory throughout the school, it is a little slower in Years 5 and 6 than it is in Years 7 and 8.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of the pupils well. A diverse range of well attended extra-curricular activities enhances the curriculum. Overall, the care, guidance and support pupils receive are satisfactory. This is a caring school and many parents comment positively on this. The school pays particular attention to pupils who are having difficulties with school life. They get daily support to help them cope with school routine and learn more effectively. However, although the school has data which track pupils' progress, these are not being used consistently in all subjects to set pupils targets, guide them academically and help them improve. The school has rightly already identified this as the next key step in raising standards. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are good in some respects. Relationships in the classrooms are good and pupils work and learn well together. Teachers know their pupils well and use that knowledge effectively to manage behaviour. There is inconsistency in the quality of marking and in how well it helps pupils improve.

The school has experienced considerable disruption in the last year because of the protracted absence of the headteacher. This has meant that the school, although well supported by the local authority, has not been moving forward as fast as one might expect. Progress has been hampered by the lack of a consistent and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of its work. Although monitoring data have been collected they have not been drawn together to provide a clear school-wide picture of strengths and areas for development. Stability has now been restored at senior leadership level and the school is starting to put in place a set of initiatives which are focused on raising standards. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory, as is the school's capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in Years 5 and 6.
- Use the tracking data it has to consistently set and review targets for individual pupils.
- Develop greater consistency in teaching, particularly in marking, by sharing the good practice that exists in the school.
- Monitor the work of the school more rigorously so that leaders at all levels, including the governing body, know exactly what needs to be improved.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards at the end of Year 6 in all core subjects as measured by the national tests in 2007 were below average and have been erratic over the last five years. The percentage of pupils attaining Level 5 and above in 2007 was significantly below average in science and mathematics. The school's own data, however, which are based on the optional tests, show that pupils made satisfactory progress over their four years at the school when measured against their starting points in both 2006 and 2007. The current Year 6 pupils are also meeting their realistic targets and progress in mathematics is better for these pupils than for those in previous years. Progress is slightly more pronounced in Years 7 and 8 than in Years 5 and 6. Information on pupils when they are at the end of Year 9 in the upper school shows that they have made at least satisfactory progress over Years 7 and 8. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are confident and enthusiastic, and have good social skills and a developing independence. Their cultural development is promoted well through visits abroad, hosting visitors from France and links with a school in Ghana. The school has established good contacts with local churches to develop pupils' spirituality. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of staying healthy; they keep fit through participation in physical activities and through eating sensibly. Pupils report that they feel very safe in school and know who to turn to should a problem arise. They really enjoy school and this is reflected in their above average attendance. Behaviour in class and around school is good and movement between lessons is calm. Pupils make an active contribution to the community through fund raising for charity and taking part in local activities, for example assisting with conservation projects in the national park. The active school council decides which charities the pupils will support. It also acts as a vehicle for pupils' views and they are proud of the changes they have brought about in their school. Pupils' preparation for their future well-being is satisfactory as their progress in literacy and numeracy is preventing it from being better.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Lessons are characterised by good relationships and well managed behaviour. Most teachers plan well and in some detail so that they can be clear on how much pupils have learned in a lesson. There is, however, an inconsistency in how well teachers set objectives at the beginning of lessons and in how well they pace their lessons. In those lessons where activities have not been as carefully timed, it is the plenary that is rushed and this leaves the teacher with an incomplete picture of the progress pupils have made. Where teachers plan for a variety of activities and for pupils to be actively involved, pupils make good progress. Good progress also occurs when teachers apply their subject knowledge well and use a range of interesting resources to engage the pupils. Although there has been a school-wide focus on marking, there is still some inconsistency in the approach to marking and levelling of pupils' work and in how much

guidance teachers give pupils on how to improve. There is particularly good practice in history. The absence from school of any teacher in this small school has a significant impact on how effectively consistency and continuity in subject teaching are maintained.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

As well as being broad, balanced and fulfilling statutory requirements, the curriculum is well enhanced by its Exmoor Curriculum, which accounts for roughly 10% of teaching time and provides a distinctive local dimension. This coherent programme of environmental and outdoor education makes a significant contribution to the personal development of pupils and provides opportunities for them to understand and use their immediate locality. This part of the curriculum enables pupils to gain nationally accredited qualifications in cycling, water sports and first aid and is valued by parents and pupils alike. Enrichment activities at lunchtime and after-school clubs are well attended as are opportunities to participate in residential activities and trips abroad. Schemes of work for citizenship, personal, social and health education and careers education are carefully planned. The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is good and the programme for religious education has improved since the last inspection when it was identified as a weakness. There are appropriate arrangements in place to develop literacy but these are still to have a consistent impact across the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Whilst care and support are good, the guidance given to pupils on how to improve their work is satisfactory. Form tutors and other pastoral staff provide good quality care to promote positive relationships, good personal development and the health and safety of their pupils. Child protection procedures are appropriate and are regularly reviewed. There are extensive and effective arrangements in place when pupils transfer in and out of the school to ensure a smooth transition and curricular continuity. The school has put in place a system for setting pupils targets and tracking their progress. There is evidence that this is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress in some of the subject areas but not all. The school is currently reviewing how it tracks pupils' progress and recognises that the rigour, consistency and effectiveness of these procedures require further improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is very clear that the school aims to be inclusive and provide opportunities for pupils to develop personally as well as academically and for their development to be rooted in the environment and culture of Exmoor. This is a view endorsed by the staff and pupils. This results in good and broad outcomes in terms of personal development for all pupils.

The lack of continuity of leadership at the school because of the headteacher's absence, has led to a lack of rigour in the way in which the academic work of the school has been monitored and evaluated. Although target-setting and the monitoring of progress towards targets are good in some subjects, they are not being pulled together well enough at school level to give a clear picture of patterns of achievement. The monitoring of teaching through observation has taken place regularly. It has been used well in the past to identify strengths and areas for

development of individual teachers as part of their continuing professional development. The recent acting headteacher also carried out effective lesson observations. This useful body of information has not, however, been analysed to enable the leadership team to have a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses in teaching. As a result, teaching does not feature in what is otherwise an effectively constructed school development plan. There is, however, now greater stability in the school's leadership and it is now better placed to implement consistent strategies to raise standards. Targets for 2009 are realistic and challenging and systematic processes to monitor progress towards those targets are shortly to be implemented.

There are good partnerships with the federated feeder schools, and with upper schools, although the headteacher and governing body realise that the federation has yet to fulfil its potential in supporting the curriculum in a situation where staffing is being cut. There are also strong links with the national park and with pastoral support agencies and individuals. Parents generally express themselves to be happy with the school, although a significant minority of parents who wrote to the inspectors said that they would like to see better communication between them and the school.

The headteacher's management of redundancies has been effective and is supported by a clear rationale. Governance of the federation and school is satisfactory. The governing body has a clear vision and aspirational targets. Under the leadership of the chair it has been quick to access additional funding, which has benefited all schools in terms of access to ICT. It is too early to establish the impact of their work in terms of the federation as a whole. The governing body has supported the school well in the headteacher's absence, working closely with the local authority in targeting that support. It has also supported the headteacher well on his return to work. The governing body, however, has not been fully involved in the development of a coherent programme of monitoring and evaluation.

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Annex A

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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Dulverton Middle and Community School, Dulverton, TA22 9EE

As you know, two inspectors recently visited your school and I am writing to you to let you know what we found.

Thank you very much for making us welcome and for taking the time to talk to us.

We believe that your school is satisfactory and has some good points. We were impressed by your behaviour and by the way you talked to us so clearly about why you liked your school. You said that you found your school to be supportive and we agreed with you and liked the good relationships you have with each other and your teachers. You have a good range of subjects to study and we thought that your Exmoor Curriculum was a bonus. You told us how much you value the way the Exmoor Curriculum helps you develop a variety of practical skills and you like the way you are trusted to be independent. Your school works well with other schools, the national park and the community.

We found that you make better progress in Years 7 and 8 than in Years 5 and 6 and we have asked the school to help you make better progress in your first two years at the school. We have asked teachers to share their good ideas, particularly about the way they mark your work. Not every teacher is making it clear which level you are working at or what you should do to improve. We would like the school to use all the information it has about your work to set you targets and to keep a regular eye on how well you are doing.

You can help by continuing to be so positive about school and by acting on the advice teachers give you.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely Anne Looney HMI

Lead inspector