

The Commonweal School

Inspection report - amended

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| Unique Reference Number | 126505 |
| Local Authority | Swindon |
| Inspection number | 315575 |
| Inspection dates | 16–17 January 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Peter Limm HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1089 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mari Williams |
| Headteacher | K Defter |
| Date of previous school inspection | 24 November 2003 |
| School address | The Mall Old Town Swindon SN1 4JE |
| Telephone number | 01793 612727 |
| Fax number | 01793 513437 |

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|--------------------------|--------------------|
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Amended Report Addendum

Report amended due to factual inaccuracy

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Commonweal School is a slightly larger than average sized school and is fully subscribed. It is a specialist college for the performing arts. There are two specialised units on site, one for physically impaired students and one for students with specific learning difficulties. Students' attainment on entry is just above average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and those for whom English is not their first language. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is above average, although the percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Commonweal School is a good school where students very much enjoy learning. They make good progress both academically and in their personal development. As a consequence, students attend regularly and behave extremely well. There is a good range of academic and vocational courses enriched by a wide range of additional activities which most students engage in. Courses are taught well by specialist teachers, who are supported by effective classroom assistants and administrative staff. A key strength of the school is the close and productive working relationship between teaching and support staff. They are both fully committed to including all students in the life of the school and to building students' self-confidence and the ability to learn effectively. The impact of the school's performing arts status is evident in excellent provision for all students, not just in the specific areas of performing arts but right across the curriculum and through involvement with the local community.

Provision in the two specialised on-site units is good. Students based in them are given every opportunity and encouragement to achieve well and take part in main school activities. Vulnerable learners, including those looked after by the local authority, are treasured by skilled support staff and teachers and as a result they flourish. Students of all ages are supported and cared for well but interventions to boost individual student achievement across the school are not consistently effective. A significant minority of parents felt that the views of students were not taken sufficiently into account by the school, but inspection evidence did not confirm this, showing instead that students play an active role in school decision-making. The arrangements with external agencies and partners are good, although the impact of off-site provision on results was disappointing in 2007.

Effective teaching ensures that almost all students make good progress academically. There are some occasions where outstanding teaching leads to outstanding learning for students, and inspectors saw examples of these high quality lessons. Not all lessons demonstrated this quality and some activities did not engage students effectively enough. Lesson plans set out the aims and activities to be carried out, but most of these plans contain insufficient details of different tasks for students of differing abilities and prior attainment.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and his senior team have shown strong leadership in helping to drive up standards in recent years and especially since the last inspection. Leadership and management of the two on-site units are also good. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and founded on good use of assessment information and other data for setting challenging targets both at whole-school level and for individual students. Governance of the school is excellent. Both school leaders and governors know that the school's improving trend in performance has been achieved despite the generally poor condition of existing accommodation. The school is actively seeking ways to secure improved accommodation and maintain its good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 9

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the excellent planning and engaging activities found in some lessons are developed in all of them.

- Make sure that interventions to boost individual student achievement are consistently good across the school and especially in Years 8 to 10.
- Work with the local authority to improve the accommodation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards of students in national tests and examinations at Key Stages 3 and 4 are above average. They have remained so in recent years and represent good achievement for students overall, despite a slight dip in results in 2007 at GCSE. The attainment of students when they took Key Stage 2 tests in their previous schools has been just above the national averages, but good progress through the school means that students continue to attain well. The school monitors and tracks students' progress very well and knows where there are weaknesses in some subjects and key stages. Its interventions to counter pockets of underachievement are having a positive impact on raising standards though not all individual student interventions are equally successful. Despite this, all groups of learners achieve well, with clear evidence for good progress for vulnerable learners, thanks to careful and well managed attention to their learning needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students much enjoy coming to school and they are proud of its good reputation in the locality. They make an excellent contribution to their own and the wider community, taking on posts of responsibility, such as becoming peer educators, reading buddies and house officials. They have an outstanding understanding of healthy lifestyles and strive to achieve them through physical exercise and the healthy food on offer in school. Most students feel really safe in school and are confident in the successful resolution of any bullying issues. The school listens to its students through the school council and, as a result, students have developed a new uniform and played a part in the restructuring of the school day. Students develop outstanding cultural awareness through the very wide range of opportunities in lessons and out-of-class activities, such as the links with a school in Gambia and the celebration day of Indian culture. They show their concern for others through their many fund raising events for charities. Students are involved extensively with the local community; for example, through staging performing arts events in the locality and acting as ambassadors to their primary feeder schools. Attendance is above the national average and numbers of exclusions are low. Behaviour is outstanding, especially in lessons; students are courteous and work well with their teachers and each other. They develop skills for the future through a range of enriching curriculum opportunities. However, in some lessons students do not fully develop their independent learning skills owing to insufficient opportunities to work in groups and pairs.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning in the school is good. The development of teaching and learning has been a priority for the school and this is helping to secure good overall progress for students. Systems for the monitoring of teaching and learning are effective. Consequently, the majority of lessons seen were well structured. Good relationships, both between pupils and

between staff and pupils, contributed greatly to learning and produced outstanding behaviour in class. Inspectors saw no unsatisfactory lessons and saw a number of lessons where the learning was outstanding. In the best lessons, students were encouraged to discuss issues and communicate their ideas clearly both in small groups and to the whole class. There was good use of students' self-evaluation. These lessons were characterised by students being fully engaged in their tasks and with a variety of approaches, which allowed learners of all abilities to succeed. In weaker lessons, planning did not meet the needs of all learners and consequently tasks did not engage students fully.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has developed a flexible, diverse curriculum which meets the needs of its students well. In Years 10 and 11, students follow a wide range of courses including GCSEs and vocational qualifications in partnership with the local college, businesses and other partnerships. The quality of the college links is developing and improving, with the addition of diploma courses this year, although some of the off-site programmes resulted in disappointing results in 2007. Students receive comprehensive guidance on choosing the most appropriate pathway and the school provides individual programmes for some of its more vulnerable students. Students value the 'opportunities to try new things' and the encouragement from staff to prepare for their future. Gifted and talented students are able to take AS levels in certain subjects and Year 10 students take a GCSE short course in philosophy and ethics a year early. Students take on a range of posts of responsibility in school and the wider community; for example, students take part in interviews for staff and many students have become sport and dance leaders. An outstanding range of well-attended clubs, performances, visits and other extra-curricular activities enriches students' development and students speak highly of this aspect of their school. The school stages a 'Clubs Roadshow' where the range of opportunities is showcased, which sparks the interest of many students and contributes to the high participation rates. The school's specialist performing arts status has had an outstanding impact on the curriculum and has enabled students with learning disabilities and/or difficulties to be better involved in the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Staff are committed to ensuring students thrive in a safe and harmonious environment. Students feel valued knowing that staff have their best interests at heart. The school celebrates their successes well through assemblies. Issues of bullying and harassment are promptly addressed and the school goes to great lengths to keep students with behaviour difficulties in school. Parents, too, are positive about the quality of care. Child protection procedures are robust and the school works well with external agencies to provide the required support. Although appropriate health and safety checks are carried out, the narrow corridors and stairs and small rooms result in cramped conditions that occasionally compromise safety. Students have good careers advice and support. There are good procedures for preparing students for transition between Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, and on to post-16 provision. Students receive good support for their personal development through the house and year systems. Students with statements of special educational need and those on 'School Action Plus' are particularly well supported in their learning. However, academic guidance is limited by some inadequate marking and inconsistent arrangements for prompt

identification of those students who show signs of underperformance, particularly in Years 8 to 10. Students' preparation for the future in terms of their economic well-being is good. Their understanding is developed through a wide range of work experience, mini-enterprise, careers advice and guidance and other projects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides good leadership and direction. There is good commitment to school improvement by the senior leadership team, which disseminates this vision well. Faculty leaders have improved their leadership and management qualities since the last inspection. They have good knowledge of the quality and standards in their faculties and are able to ensure that teachers use data effectively to diagnose and address areas of weakness. Individual faculty self-evaluations are rigorous and extensive and feed into the comprehensive whole-school evaluation process. The process of setting targets is secure and there is abundant data to track students' progress. Some departments are at an early stage of using this data effectively. Leadership of the specialist performing arts area is excellent and specialist status targets have been met or are well on the way to being met, especially in the school's community work. The school is inclusive in its strong support for the students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are vulnerable. Many of the varied links with external agencies and partners are effective in improving provision for students. Governance of the school is excellent and governors strive hard to secure the best provision for the school. This includes exploring how best to improve the school's accommodation, which remains poor in many areas. There is good capacity to make further improvements.

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

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| 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

| | |
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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 |
| 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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage | NA |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| 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 | 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| 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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 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

20 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Commonweal School, Swindon, SN1 4JE

Thank you for your friendly welcome and positive contributions to the inspectors during our visit. Your school is providing you with a good quality all-round education that will serve you well in your future. We noted the wide range of choices available, particularly the number of clubs and out-of-lesson activities. We thought the additional opportunities in the performing arts are excellent. The impact of this provision shows in your very positive contributions to the school and the wider community. The commitment of teaching and support staff is ensuring your progress is good and often excellent, especially for those of you with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The collaboration of teachers, teaching assistants and administrative staff is also good. There is much to celebrate.

We saw predominantly good teaching, and agree with most of you and your parents that the school is a lively place in which to learn and which keeps you safe and encourages you to live healthy lifestyles.

There are three things that could help the school become even better. First, all lessons should be planned to engage you actively in tasks as the best lessons do. Second, the school will provide additional support in Key Stage 3 for those of you who need it. Finally, although you told us you liked the buildings, we agree with the school that your accommodation needs improving and it is seeking ways to do this. In the meantime you can help by making sure cramped spaces do not become unsafe for you.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

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Yours sincerely

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector