

# Plymstock School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113537
<b>Local Authority</b>	Plymouth
<b>Inspection number</b>	325839
<b>Inspection date</b>	18 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	David Humphries HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1531
Sixth form	232
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Stephen Burns
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Farmer
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 March 2006
<b>School address</b>	Church Road Plymstock Plymouth PL9 9AZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01752 402679
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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following:

- the standards reached by students at age 16 and in the sixth form and the progress that they make
- the rigour and accuracy of the school's judgements about the quality of teaching and learning
- the impact of leadership and management on:-the school's promotion of community cohesion-communication with parents-the overall effectiveness of the sixth form.

Inspectors gathered evidence from discussions with students, staff and governors; lesson observations conducted jointly with school staff; scrutiny of key documents; analysis of assessment data; and analysis of the questionnaires returned by parents and carers. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

Plymstock School is located in the eastern part of Plymouth, but draws students from a wider area of the city and is regularly oversubscribed. The sixth form has grown substantially over the last three years. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, although the school includes a unit for students from across the city with autistic spectrum disorders. The great majority of students are from White British backgrounds and very few speak a first language other than English. Plymstock was successfully redesignated as a specialist sports school in 2006.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

- Plymstock is an outstanding school. One parent commented on the 'atmosphere of purpose and pride' which characterises the school and this is one of its key strengths. High expectations and a sharp focus on learning and achieving are successfully combined with a pervading sense of care and support for individuals. This enables students to thrive and thoroughly enjoy their education. The parent of a Year 11 student commented, 'Plymstock must be good; my daughter never, ever wants to leave!' Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They have a clear sense of right and wrong and the great majority behave extremely well, both in lessons and round and about the school. They show a mature approach to the risks they face in their lives outside school and know all about how to act safely and healthily. Students are confident and articulate and have clear opinions about the school and their own education. The school has made significant progress in developing the ways in which it seeks their views and now provides greater opportunities for them to contribute to the life of the school and wider community. Students appreciate these improvements, but it is an indication of their mature, thoughtful attitudes that they would appreciate even more opportunities to take on responsibility and participate in decision making. The school is working hard to promote community cohesion, often drawing imaginatively on its specialist status. However, senior leaders recognise that planning and evaluating the impact of initiatives to provide students with opportunities to work with others from diverse ethnic and faith groups are not yet sufficiently systematic.

The school has given a high priority to improving the quality of teaching, which is now outstanding. Senior leaders have put in place a comprehensive programme of lesson observations, and the joint observations conducted during the inspection show that the judgements that they make about teaching and learning are rigorous and accurate. Assessment information is used very effectively to identify any signs of underachievement, and when this occurs intervention is prompt and highly supportive.

Plymstock is a highly inclusive school with a deep commitment to meeting the needs of all its students, including those with complex learning difficulties. One parent, commenting on her son, wrote, 'His improvement on every level since joining Plymstock has been outstanding and this is due to the dedication, patience and strong leadership of the learning support team.' This accurately reflects the outstanding care, guidance and support which are evident throughout the school. There is a highly developed network of support programmes which make very good use of the skills of other adults to complement the work undertaken by teachers and senior pastoral staff. The school draws very constructively on specialist support from external agencies when appropriate. The curriculum is underpinned by a clear rationale which emphasises the importance of subjects such as English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages for students' future education and economic well-being, rather than simply accumulating GCSE grades to paint a more favourable picture of the attainment of individual students and the school as a whole. In Key Stage 3 a 'learn to learn' programme is helping to develop students' independent learning skills while the Key Stage 4 curriculum includes a well-conceived blend of academic and vocational courses, built around five distinct progression routes. The curriculum is greatly enhanced by the school's specialist status and by a rich variety of extra-curricular activities, including after-school revision classes and opportunities to study additional subjects. Overall, the curriculum is very well matched with students' needs and aspirations.

A combination of students' very positive attitudes, high quality teaching and a very well-designed curriculum exerts a powerful influence on learning. Students' attainment when they enter the school is broadly average, but they make outstanding progress so that the standards they reach at ages 14 and 16 are consistently well above average. GCSE results in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages are consistently high and, after a slight dip in 2008, the school's tracking data show that results in English are set for a substantial improvement in 2009. The school has been extremely successful at maintaining a strong, rising trend in the proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics: this is well above the national average.

Leadership and management are good. Some aspects are outstanding, but the school's leaders, including the governing body, are aware that they have not paid sufficient attention to the regular monitoring of some important policies and procedures, to be sure that they are being fully implemented. The approach to community cohesion is a case in point. In recent years the school has experienced a period of turbulence, with significant changes in the senior leadership team, including the appointment of a new headteacher. During this time it demonstrated a remarkable collective resilience and consistency of vision so that the quality of education and the standards achieved by students were not adversely affected and, indeed, there were some significant improvements in the school's performance. The current headteacher is now well established and has brought a clear sense of direction and ambition to the work of the school. His very effective leadership is supported by a strong team of senior and middle leaders, combining wisdom and experience with enthusiasm and new thinking. The governing body provides strong support for the school, but this is matched by a high level of challenge which is constructive, but also perceptive and rigorous.

Senior leaders and governors show an unswerving commitment to continuing to improve the school. The areas for improvement arising from the last inspection have been dealt with very effectively. The great majority of parents and carers have a high regard for the work of the school, with 96% of the questionnaires returned during the inspection suggesting that parents believe that their children enjoy school, make good progress and are safe and well cared for. Communication between home and school, although much improved since the last inspection when it was a significant issue, is still a concern for a small minority of parents.

The analysis of performance data by senior leaders and governors is thorough and meticulous and when weaknesses are identified, for example in a particular subject area, these are dealt with vigorously but supportively. In general, senior leaders and governors have an astute understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Given these great strengths and the improvements made in recent years, and despite the issues relating to policies and procedures, the school is very well placed to improve further.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form has improved markedly since the last inspection and is now good. Any complacency which existed in the past has been largely eradicated. The sixth form is led with energy and purpose, and many of the approaches to raising achievement in the main school are now being successfully adapted and implemented in the sixth form. For example, there is now a much sharper approach to tracking students' progress and identifying those at risk of underachieving: where necessary, they receive carefully targeted one-to-one support from a learning mentor. While some of these initiatives are not yet fully embedded, they are already beginning to have a significant impact. Recruitment and retention rates are

very high and sixth formers are playing an increasingly prominent role in the life of the school. The outstanding curriculum is enhanced by productive partnerships with other post-16 providers and is sufficiently flexible to meet a wide range of individual needs. Students are now making good progress and the overall standards that they reach at the end of Year 13 are above average because teaching is consistently good.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Plan and evaluate more systematically the impact of the school's work to promote community cohesion, particularly in relation to the opportunities that students have to work with others from diverse ethnic and faith groups.
- Sharpen the monitoring of key policies and procedures in order to ensure that they are being implemented consistently.

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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	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1	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	1	1

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	1	

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	1	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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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	

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

25 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Plymstock School, Plymouth PL9 9AZ

My colleague and I enjoyed meeting some of you and listening to your views when your school was inspected on 18 March 2009. 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 in more detail what the school does well and how it can become even better.

Plymstock is an outstanding school. High quality teaching, an excellent curriculum and your own very positive attitudes to learning help you to make outstanding progress in the main school so that the standards that you reach by the end of Year 11 are well above average. The school provides you with first-rate support, particularly for those of you who need additional help to learn and those who are not doing as well as you should be. You have a clear sense of right and wrong and the great majority of you behave extremely well. You become confident and articulate young adults who are eager to express your views and contribute to the life of the school and wider community. The sixth form has improved greatly since the last inspection. Some of the approaches which have been so successful in the main school are now being implemented in the sixth form, and this is helping to raise standards.

One of the main reasons why your school is so successful is that it is very well led. The headteacher is ambitious for the future and he is very well supported by a team of able and committed staff who want the very best for you. The governing body works very effectively with senior leaders to ensure that the school continues to improve. We think that there are two key priorities:

- Providing you with more opportunities to work with others from diverse ethnic and faith groups. It is important that you can play your part in a modern, diverse society and I hope that you will respond positively.
- Ensuring that there is more rigorous monitoring of key policies and procedures so the school can be sure that these are being implemented consistently.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

David Humphries

Her Majesty's Inspector