

# Coombe Dean School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113538
<b>Local Authority</b>	Plymouth
<b>Inspection number</b>	325840
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Karl Sampson 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)	1101
Sixth form	202
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Hanno Payne
<b>Headteacher</b>	Patrick Freat
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18 May 2006
<b>School address</b>	Charnhill Way Elburton Plymouth PL9 8ES
<b>Telephone number</b>	01752 406961
<b>Fax number</b>	01752 482140

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<b>Age group</b>	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

Coombe Dean is a larger than average comprehensive school. It draws students from across Plymouth as well as the South Hams area of Devon. Almost all students are of White British heritage and the percentage from minority ethnic groups or whose first language is not English is much lower than the national average. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is low. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above the national average. These include students who have moderate learning difficulties or who have social, emotional and behavioural issues. There is a slightly lower than average proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs. The school was redesignated as a mathematics and computing school in 2007 and also designated as a Training School in 2008.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Coombe Dean is an outstanding school where students flourish in an environment that embodies a strong sense of community, responsibility and inclusion. This inclusive philosophy is at the heart of the school's high quality curriculum, care and guidance for students. The school is extremely well led by a headteacher who has a sharply focused vision for the school's future. Together with a strong senior leadership team, he has improved further what was an already good school. Monitoring of the school's work is rigorous and sharply focused to bring about continuous improvement. As a result, students' achievement during their time at Coombe Dean is outstanding. There has been an upward trend in Year 9 and Year 11 standards and achievement over the last three years and students regularly exceed the challenging targets set by the school. The outstanding progress made by students in Year 11 relative to their starting points placed the school in the top 4% of schools nationally in 2008 for achievement. Leaders and governors make incisive financial decisions, including the deployment of staff and resources. Improvements since the last inspection are numerous and capacity to make further improvements is outstanding.

Coombe Dean is a truly inclusive community school where staff are fully committed to ensuring all students are not only developed as learners, but also encouraged to be responsible and active citizens of a global community. Students' personal development is good overall with many outstanding aspects. They have an excellent awareness of healthy lifestyles, eat well and exercise regularly. Students say they feel exceptionally safe in school, and systems to support their welfare and their personal and academic development are robust. Their involvement in the school and wider community is excellent and they take on responsibilities with pride. Behaviour is good in and around the school; students are polite and courteous to each other and staff and say that they enjoy their time at the school. There has been a slight drop in attendance for current Key Stage 4 students but the school has taken effective measures to ensure that it comes back into line with the rest of the school. The school has worked hard to ensure that this has not had a detrimental effect on their achievement and progress. Excellent links exist with external services to support the needs of individual students, particularly the most vulnerable such as looked after children or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Many parents wrote to inspectors to say how delighted they were with the education and care provided by the school. One parent summarised the views of many as follows: 'The school is encouraging our children to grow into responsible, mature young adults, responsible for their learning, their behaviour, the environment and those around them.'

The curriculum is outstanding in its breadth, depth and flexibility and as a result is able to match the full range of learners' aspirations and capabilities. As one parent said, 'The school seeks to tap into the best of each child and looks for ways through the curriculum to help them develop their areas of interest and talent.' Teaching and learning are good overall and some lessons observed were outstanding. The recent designation as a Training School has enabled the school to focus on developing the quality of learning across the school. This was evident in many of the lessons observed, although opportunities to work independently were not developed fully in all lessons. The best marking is exemplary, although it is not yet all at this level.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

- During their two years in the sixth form, students make good progress overall to reach above average standards. The school has an inclusive approach in promoting further studies for all students. A third of students follow vocational courses and their achievement is outstanding. The school has been at the forefront of the 14 to 19 curriculum development and works closely in a consortium with other local providers. As a result, the range of A-level and vocational courses on offer is rich, extensive and able to meet the needs and aspirations of all its learners. Leadership and management are good and there are effective systems in place to monitor sixth form performance. These are used regularly and effectively to identify areas of underachievement and plan appropriate interventions to support learning. Teaching is good overall and many teachers work hard to help students become independent learners, although this is not always the case across all subjects. Retention rates are high and are evidence of students' enjoyment of the sixth form. Pastoral care is outstanding and students value the extensive range of support from their teachers. They greatly enjoy life in the sixth form and blossom into confident, outgoing and mature individuals. They mentor younger students, make an excellent positive contribution in their work with the local community and have established excellent international links. Students are well advised about higher education, training and employment options, a large majority of whom move on to higher education as first generation university students.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Bring all marking up to the level of the best.
- Ensure students are given more opportunities to work independently of the teacher and take greater responsibility for their work.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 1

Students enter the school with standards which are slightly below that found nationally. The school's own analysis of students' lower than average literacy skills on entry leads to a range of targeted intervention for all students through an exemplary programme of functional skills support. This has resulted in a rise in the percentage of students in Year 9 attaining Level 5 in English, mathematics and science and in students making good progress in 2007. The progress students make at Key Stage 4 has also improved significantly in the last three years. In 2008, standards as measured by the percentage of students attaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE rose by 10%, to 88%. When English and mathematics are included, standards are slightly below that achieved nationally but this represents excellent progress when set against challenging targets. In 2008, the school was placed in the top 4% of schools nationally for the progress which its students made between Year 7 and Year 11. This represents exceptional progress given their starting points. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also made as good progress as their peers due to careful tracking, prompt intervention and well-targeted additional support. The school's latest analysis of performance, coursework assessments and externally assessed tests for 2009 suggests that students are on track to achieve even better results by the end of this academic year.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

As a result of good spiritual, moral and social development, students develop their personal skills and think about others. Peer mentors are highly regarded by younger students, who value their advice and support. The school's focus on healthy lifestyles, sustainability and the development of global communities has supported students' development into active citizens. They fundraise extensively for a number of charitable causes and take up many opportunities offered to express their views through the school senate and a range of student voice activities. They have a growing understanding of cultures and customs around the world, although their appreciation of multicultural issues within Britain is less secure.

Students feel exceptionally safe and their behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. They relate very well to each other and their teachers and have positive attitudes to learning and to their school. Students' appreciation and adoption of healthy lifestyles is excellent. The school is recognised as a centre of national good practice by the School Food Trust and has high participation rates in the healthy cooking club and a wide range of sporting activities. Students take on a wide variety of responsibilities within the school. These include running the shop and the lunch team. An excellent citizenship and work-related learning programme allied with a strong emphasis on basic skills means that students are extremely well prepared for the future. Attendance is currently satisfactory as the latest figures show a slight drop for Key Stage 4 students. However, this is being addressed through the effective use of strategies to improve individual attendance. The school has worked hard to ensure that students' progress and achievement have not been adversely affected. An integrated student services centre has been particularly effective in supporting students who are at risk of exclusion.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

There are some clear and consistent strengths in teaching and learning and the large majority of lessons are good or better. Teachers have high expectations of their students and positive working relationships contribute well to learning. The best lessons are characterised by excellent classroom management, confident teaching, probing questioning and a range of well-planned activities to ensure that learning moves along briskly. This helps students of all abilities to remain on task and make very good progress. Students are enthused by their teachers' passion for their subject and are often involved in assessing and reflecting on their own work to consolidate learning. In a small minority of lessons teachers over-direct proceedings and students in these lessons do not have sufficient time to work independently. As a result they become distracted and lose their focus. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped considerably by the additional support they receive.

Most students know their targets and understand how well they are doing. However, the quality of the marking of students' work is variable. Where it is good, teachers make it clear how work should be improved and clearly correct any misunderstandings, but sometimes marking is irregular and superficial and this does not move students on in their learning. The school's rigorous target setting, tracking and sharply focused support programmes strengthen the good teaching across the school and enable the students to make excellent progress.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

The school provides an outstanding curriculum. Particular strengths exist in planning, evaluating and improving the curriculum so that it meets individual needs very well. For example, having identified an issue with weaker literacy skills at Key Stage 3 the school has introduced phonics work and an accelerated reading programme for some groups as well as a whole key stage reading programme. Effective monitoring and regular evaluation show clear evidence of the impact that the programme is having on raising standards and improving achievement. New diplomas at Key Stage 4 and a whole-school policy of encouraging the development of functional skills across subjects support these developments as students move through the school.

Students in Key Stage 4 follow a wide range of courses, including GCSEs, vocational courses and functional skills courses. Provision is also made for groups of students to work with other off-site vocational training providers in addition to their basic school entitlement. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive very good guidance to ensure they are fully included. Students are prepared very well for future progression, and the school's programme of work-related skills and work experience is exemplary. The contribution of the school's specialism in mathematics and computing is excellent and permeates the curriculum. For example, all homework is posted on the school's website daily and over 75% of students regularly use the school's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to support their learning when at home. The range and quality of academic and sporting clubs, visits and other out-of-school activities are outstanding and the level of students' participation is very high.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

This is an inclusive and happy place in which students thrive as a result of the outstanding care, guidance and support provided. There is effective child protection and safeguarding, and robust health and safety systems are in place. The school works very well in partnership with parents, who comment about how proud they are to be 'part of the school' and members of 'the Coombe Dean family'. When students join the school their needs are correctly identified and appropriate and effective programmes of support are put in place. As they move through the school students are guided extremely well when making curricular choices and deciding on progression routes at the end of key stages. A number of changes have been recently introduced to encourage better attendance. These changes have met with some success, although their impact has yet to be fully felt.

The school has developed an outstanding and comprehensive system to track the progress of all students. The way that the school uses this data to support different groups of students as well as individuals is a real strength of the school. As a result, students know their targets and value the excellent intervention programmes which are developed to support their individual needs. The school has recently introduced a programme of home visits which offer learning skills sessions for parents so they better understand how to support their children's learning. These visits are strengthening the progress made by those students who are involved. A range of personalised support programmes provides excellent support for vulnerable students such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 1

The headteacher is outstanding in his leadership and vision for the school. Staff appreciate his approach to the distribution of the responsibility for learning and development and respond very positively to these opportunities. The headteacher is supported exceptionally well by the team of senior leaders who work very closely together to monitor, evaluate and improve the work of the school; procedures for this are rigorous. Senior leaders set challenging targets for the school, have an excellent knowledge of the school's strengths and weakness and are unafraid to tackle difficult issues in order to bring about improvements. Governors have a thorough understanding of the school's work and have increasingly undertaken a more challenging and critical approach to their role. They discharge their duties very well. Together they have brought about the improvements to an already good school.

Middle leaders display a clear understanding of the key priorities for the school. They are an integral part in the development and implementation of sharply focused interventions, thereby enabling the school to move forward. Recent changes at middle leader level have strengthened the collaboration between subject leaders, pastoral leaders and tutors. As a result, these groups play a greater role in evaluating students' standards and progress, identifying any underachievement and taking robust actions where applicable. This is supported by an exemplary system of tracking and monitoring which ensures that students attain as well as they do and make outstanding progress by the end of Key Stage 4. Community cohesion is promoted well at a local and international level but is not as strong from a national perspective. Senior leaders continue to set a clear direction for further improvement.

The school's specialist subjects are led and managed extremely well and provision is regularly evaluated to ensure that it continues to drive whole-school improvement. The mathematics and computing aspects support the curriculum well and specialist subject targets continue to be met or exceeded. Standards and achievement in mathematics continue to rise and information and communication technology (ICT) produces one of the highest percentage of students achieving A\* to C grades across the whole school. Other subjects have benefited from the school's specialism, with the delivery of functional skills across the whole school and by the creation of the school's VLE to support extended learning. The school's outreach work is enabling partner primary schools to access high quality ICT specialist support. The recent Training School status has increased training and development opportunities for all staff and is leading to further improvements in teaching quality.



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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	16-19
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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	2	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>	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	1
The attendance of learners	3	2
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2	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>	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
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	

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

13 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Coombe Dean School, Plymouth, PL9 8ES

We very much enjoyed meeting you on our visit to your school. Special thanks should go to the student guides who helped us find our way around the school. It was very informative to hear all of your views and it helped us to reach our judgements. We found your school to be outstanding and I would like to share with you our key findings.

Standards and achievement have improved significantly since the last inspection and the good quality teaching and learning that you receive are helping you to make excellent progress. You enjoy your lessons but sometimes you are not given enough opportunity to take more responsibility for your own learning. The school's tracking, target setting and sharply focused support programmes support you extremely well in achieving excellent outcomes overall. We saw exemplary marking but it is not all currently at this high level. The curriculum is outstanding and meets your individual needs extremely well. The extra-curricular programmes offer you an outstanding range of activities and the vast majority of you take full advantage of them. You told us you feel exceptionally safe and we think your behaviour in and around the school and in lessons is good. You have great opportunities to develop personally and academically.

We found the headteacher to be outstanding in his leadership. He, with other senior leaders, has improved further what was already a good school. Senior leaders and governors rigorously monitor the quality of the school's work in order to bring about continuous improvement.

- Further to your comments and work that we saw, we have identified two areas for improvement. These are to:
- bring all marking up to the level of the best
- ensure students are given more opportunities to work independently of the teacher and take greater responsibility for their work.

You can certainly help the teachers with some of these things. Thank you once again for your help during our visit and good luck with your work in the future!

Yours faithfully

Karl Sampson Her Majesty's Inspector