

Stanchester Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123889
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	328013
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Sanderson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	890
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Gann
Headteacher	Glyndwr Ottery
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Stoke-sub-Hamdon Stoke-sub-Hamdon TA14 6UG
Telephone number	01935 823200
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Age group	11–16
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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

Stanchester Community School is an average sized comprehensive school. Most students are from a White British background and the number of students whose first language is not English is low for a school of this size. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below average. The most commonly identified needs relate to emotional and behavioural difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and physical disabilities. The school obtained specialist status in media arts in 2004. There is a nursery school maintained by the local authority on the school's site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Stanchester Community School provides students with a satisfactory standard of education. It is an inclusive school in which all students are well cared for and supported. They much enjoy coming to school and this is evident in their good attendance. As one parent stated, 'Stanchester is a happy and caring school.'

Standards are broadly average when students enter the school and remain so when they leave. This confirms that students make satisfactory progress in their learning between Years 7 and 11. However, the situation is not quite as straightforward as this because progress is slower in some subjects than others. For example, the achievement of Year 11 students in 2008 was good in English but inadequate in mathematics. Effective action and more stable staffing in the mathematics department have led to an improvement in standards and students' progress is now satisfactory. There is also a difference in the progress made by boys and girls across the school. The relative progress made by girls is greater than that made by boys.

Teaching and learning across the school are satisfactory, although some lessons are outstanding. Where teachers make the lessons exciting and relevant to the students, they learn well and make good progress. However, not all teaching has enough variety to challenge and enthuse the students, and at times teachers can talk for too long and do not provide enough opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills. The quality of teaching and learning across the school is not consistently good enough to enable students to make good progress. Some teachers mark work well and give clear advice to students about how to improve. However, this good practice is not consistent across the school.

The school has forged strong partnerships with a range of outside agencies to support the personal development and well-being of all students. Spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Students report that they feel safe in school and that staff listen to and respond to their views through the house and school councils. Child protection procedures are fully in place and the school works well with a wide range of professionals to safeguard and support students. Checks on staff are robust and meet government requirements.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. A number of recent changes have been made to the curriculum, the school's pastoral system and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These are beginning to have a positive impact on students' personal development and achievement. There is successful leadership of some subjects and aspects of the school's work. However, the unevenness in students' performance reflects inconsistencies in the quality of leadership across the school. The school has identified clear priorities for development and rising standards in mathematics indicate it has satisfactory capacity for improvement.

The school has made effective use of its specialist status to develop links with the wider community. Specialist status has also had an impact on the quality of teaching and the progress made by students in the specialist subjects of English, art and design and music. However, the impact on students' progress across the school has been more limited.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in mathematics by improving the quality of teaching.
- Improve the progress made by boys in all subjects.

- Improve the consistency of good and better teaching across the school, including the quality of marking, by effectively sharing good and outstanding practice.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged 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

The percentage of students attaining Level 5, the national level of expectation, by the end of Year 9 has been average for a number of years. However, the percentage of students attaining the higher Levels 6 and 7 declined in 2007 and was below the national average in English and mathematics. Provisional results for 2008 indicate that this has remained the case. Current tracking information indicates that standards are rising and students are on course to attain broadly average standards in 2009, indicating that they are making satisfactory progress.

Overall standards at the end of Year 11 were broadly average in 2008 but this masks an important area of underachievement. Standards in mathematics were significantly below average and achievement in this subject was inadequate. As a consequence, the percentage of students attaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics was also significantly below average. The staffing in the mathematics department is now more stable and the school has taken a number of effective steps to improve achievement. It is now satisfactory, with students on track to attain broadly average standards in 2009. Teaching is still not as strong as in English, where standards have been above average for the past three years, and the progress of students in this subject is good. The school attained its specialist school targets in English literature, media studies, art and design and music in 2008. Although the overall achievement of students is satisfactory, there is a difference in the progress made by girls and boys. Girls have made better relative progress than boys during the past three years. The progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that of their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most students are enthusiastic about coming to school; they enjoy learning and attendance levels are above the national average. The behaviour of students is satisfactory, with some excellent attitudes observed in higher ability groups in Years 10 and 11. However, inspection evidence supported the views of some parents that learning is sometimes affected by low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons. A few parents also expressed concern about bullying within the school but the wide range of students spoken to during the inspection reported that bullying occurred very rarely. They stated that when it did occur staff dealt with incidents quickly and effectively. Students feel that they are dealt with fairly and supported well. They are enthusiastic about the new house system that they say is 'working brilliantly'. Many are keen supporters of school clubs and activities, with a large number involved in the production of Bussy Malone. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with students showing a good level of awareness of other cultures and faiths. Year 7 students show a clear understanding of the dangers of smoking and knowledge of health and environmental issues. Although students have a secure understanding of healthy lifestyles, many still choose to bring crisps and other unhealthy foods to school. Students have a good awareness of how to be safe in school and

their awareness of the potential dangers of the Internet is particularly strong. Many students make a good contribution to their school and to the wider community through raising money for charities and through their work on the house and school councils. However, some lack of punctuality and a tendency to leave litter around the school indicate that, overall, students' contribution to the community is satisfactory rather than good. Enterprise activities, work experience and college placements help to ensure that students are aware of the world of work and the range of training and employment options available for them. However, low achievement in mathematics means that economic well-being is only satisfactory overall.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although there are examples of good and sometimes outstanding practice, the quality of teaching and learning is only satisfactory as it is not consistently good enough across the school to ensure students make good progress.

In the good lessons, teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour and their attitude to learning. They use skilful questioning to check students' understanding, plan their lessons to include a variety of activities and ensure that they meet the needs of all the learners in the class. The school's media arts specialism has also had a positive impact on the way teachers and students use digital technology to support learning. Effective support is provided to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, helping them to achieve their learning targets. However, too many lessons are satisfactory and characterised by a lack of challenge for all students. In these lessons, teachers do not always plan their activities to match the ability range of students in the class and sometimes talk for too long rather than actively engaging students in learning.

Teachers' marking of students' work varies and does not always identify what steps students need to take to improve. For example, the school's 'two stars, one wish' marking system is used effectively in some subjects but students commented that this is not the case in all areas of the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Currently, the school curriculum satisfactorily meets the needs of all students. However, recent changes and good plans for future development are leading to improvement. The leadership team carried out a review of the curriculum last year after judging that the range and nature of courses offered to students were not sufficiently meeting the needs of all students and that this was having an impact on their levels of achievement. Some good changes were made to the curriculum in September 2008. These included the introduction of an alternative curriculum for gifted and talented students in Year 8 through an accelerated learning programme and a course to enable all students to obtain an information and communication technology qualification by the end of Year 10. Good plans are in place to further extend the school's vocational provision in September 2009. Although these recent and planned developments are innovative, they are not completely in place and so have yet to fully impact on students' achievement.

Education for health, safety and well-being is successfully delivered through citizenship, which is part of the core curriculum. Students are also provided with good opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world of work through opportunities such as work experience and enterprise activities. A wide range of well-attended enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities are offered to students, including those with particular gifts and talents. Many of these activities are related to the school's specialism in media arts. These activities broaden students' skills and experience well and positively contribute to their enjoyment of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is good and the newly introduced house system is proving popular; students believe that it has made a vast difference to their everyday experience in school. Students feel that they are listened to and the student council is very active in improving aspects of care for their fellow students.

Attendance data are monitored carefully and good procedures are in place to ensure that students attend regularly. New procedures, including the 'Hub', mean that provision for vulnerable students and individuals with specific needs is good, and effective use is made of outside agencies in supporting all students. The recently established 'Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Team' have already put in place a new and effective system of monitoring the progress of students with specific needs. The quality of medical care, first aid and other support is good.

Academic guidance is good. Data are used well and the school can now track student progress more effectively. Those students who are underachieving are identified and provided with effective support, such as mentoring. These procedures are beginning to have a positive impact on students' achievement. Good advice and guidance on subject and course options ensure that students are confident and make informed choices about courses at local and more distant colleges and about the importance of employment with training.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and his senior leadership team have created a strongly inclusive and caring ethos in the school, making it a place where students feel safe and valued. They enjoy coming to school and several stated that 'the teachers look after us well'.

The leadership team has an accurate understanding of the overall strengths and weakness of the school. However, self-evaluation is not always linked tightly enough to students' achievement; consequently, judgements about the school's performance in some areas have been generous. Senior leaders have not in the past taken a clear enough strategic view of priorities for improvement. However, they are now clearly focused on key initiatives to raise standards and achievement and these are beginning to have an impact. Last academic year the school experienced difficulty in the recruitment and retention of staff and the leadership team made strenuous efforts to minimise the impact of these difficulties on students' learning. However, staffing issues did affect students' progress, particularly in mathematics and modern foreign languages. These staffing issues have now been resolved. Middle leaders are growing in confidence and becoming increasingly accountable for standards in their own subjects. The

cycle of examination analysis, team reviews and plans has helped them to be more evaluative of the performance of their teams. Although the quality of middle leadership is improving, variation in students' achievement between subjects indicates that unevenness in practice remains.

Governors know the school well and have ensured that all statutory requirements are in place. They have not in the past given a strong enough steer on improvement planning, linked to a shared strategic vision for the school. However, they are now beginning to effectively challenge the leadership team and to hold it accountable for raising standards of achievement.

The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. There are well developed links with feeder primary schools and further education colleges, with local sports clubs and with business partners. Extended services provision is good, including a strong family learning programme. Students participate in a range of activities within the local community and, through their curriculum, have a good understanding of the range of cultures and faiths found in this country and in the world.

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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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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 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?	2

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 eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

Dear Students,

Inspection of Stanchester Community School, Stoke-sub-Hamdon, Somerset TA14 6UG

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school recently. We met and talked with a number of you and sat in some of your lessons. Now that we have finished the inspection, we wanted to let you know our findings.

Your school provides you with a satisfactory standard of education. The following points are the key strengths of the school.

- You are well supported and cared for by staff in the school.
- You enjoy school and your levels of attendance are higher than those seen nationally.
- The school offers you a wide range of after-school opportunities. It was good to hear that many of you attend these clubs and activities.
- You feel that teachers treat you fairly and that your views are sought and responded to through the house and school councils.
- Teachers track your progress well and provide those of you who are not making the progress you should with additional support such as revision classes or mentoring.
- You have the opportunity to participate in a range of local community events, and lessons are helping you develop a good understanding of the range of cultures and faiths found in this country and around the world.

To make your school even better we have asked the school leadership team to make the following improvements.

- Improve the progress you make in mathematics so that you achieve higher grades in examinations at the end of Year 11.
- Improve the progress made by boys in all subjects.
- Ensure that all lessons are as good as the best ones you currently receive.

You can help with this by continuing to work hard in lessons and getting fully involved in the learning activities that are organised for you.

Thank you again and I wish you all good luck for the future.

Yours faithfully,

Peter Sanderson

Her Majesty's Inspector