

Danesfield Church of England Voluntary Controlled Community Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123895
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	328017
Inspection date	18 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Nick Green 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 (total)	410
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Rowe
Headteacher	Ian Bradbury
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2006
School address	North Road Williton TA4 4SW
Telephone number	01984 632581
Fax number	01984 633085

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, the personal development and well-being of students, care, guidance and support, and aspects of leadership and management. Inspectors met with staff and students, observed parts of lessons, and scrutinised school documentation and the parental questionnaires. 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

The school serves a community which is economically and socially mixed, with many students coming from areas of rural deprivation. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. Very few students have English as an additional language. In May 2007, the school became part of a federation with two first schools under the leadership of a single governing body. In September 2008 the headteacher was appointed to the substantive post of headteacher at Old Cleeve First School. In June 2009 he was appointed executive head of the federation. One of the senior members of staff is the associate headteacher of both these schools. At the same time, it was designated a specialist science school. The school has held several awards over recent years, including those for Dyslexia Friendly School, Basic Skills Quality Mark and Healthy Schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school's overall effectiveness is good. It ensures that students' achievement is good. However, in most other respects, Danesfield is an outstanding school. The school has taken very effective steps to increase its effectiveness since the last inspection and this is evident in the improvements in students' personal development and well-being, in the curriculum and in the care, guidance and support provided for all students. The overwhelming majority of parents justifiably have great confidence in the school. As one wrote, 'Our son has thoroughly enjoyed his time at Danesfield, largely due to the ethos and friendly atmosphere created by the staff; children get on well with their teachers, are happy and confident and are encouraged to care about others.' Underpinning the school's success are outstanding leadership and management, driven by the clear vision and direction of the headteacher and leadership team. Senior leaders are focused firmly on raising achievement by improving teaching and learning and the curriculum, and by enabling students to thrive in a safe and caring environment. Students' standards at the end of Year 6 have been broadly average for the last three years; however in English they were below average last year, and in science they have been consistently above. Given students' attainment on entry to the school, their progress has been good during this period, representing good achievement overall by the end of Year 6. School data shows that Standards in Year 8 have been consistently high in most subjects and exceptionally high in science. No group of students has underperformed, although a small group of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Year 6 last year made less progress than their peers. This year students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been given additional well-targeted support to enable them to reach their potential. Students' current standards are at least as high as in previous years and have improved in English in Year 6. Based on students' starting points when they enter the school, students' progress and achievement are good by the time they leave, and outstanding in science.

A great strength of the school is the way it effectively promotes students' personal development and well-being. This is firmly underpinned by the school's emphasis on Christian values, which are reflected in the students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students of all ages enjoy school immensely and are proud to belong to the school's community. As a result, their punctuality and attendance are good. The level of exclusions is low and has fallen significantly over recent years. Students' pride in their school is shown by the complete lack of graffiti around the school and almost total absence of litter. Students have an excellent awareness of a healthy lifestyle. Most take advantage of the healthy choices they are offered in the school canteen and a high proportion engage enthusiastically in physical exercise and sport. Students are emphatic about how safe they feel in school, and have great confidence in staff to help them resolve any issues when they occur. Bullying and racist incidents are extremely rare. Students are safety-conscious in practical lessons and very aware of how to manage risk in their lives. Attitudes to learning are extremely positive, and behaviour in classrooms and around school is exemplary.

Students make an excellent contribution to the school community by taking advantage of the many opportunities that are available for them to take responsibility. Students' roles as class and library monitors, sports team members and captains and house members develop their self-confidence and esteem. Membership of the school council and the role of prefect are highly prized; they develop students' leadership skills very well. Students' contributions to the local community are extensive. They participate in several charity fundraising events, perform music

and drama, and are involved in church and community events. However, students' understanding of other diverse communities in Britain and the opportunity to build positive relationships with them are limited. Students exhibit strong team and workplace skills through the good range of enterprise activities they undertake. The effective development of personal qualities and the acquisition of good basic skills prepare students very well for their future economic well-being. As one parent commented, 'Danesfield enables students to progress and flourish.'

Teaching and learning are good, and a significant minority of lessons are outstanding. Teachers plan thoroughly and fully share the well-considered learning objectives of lessons with students. A variety of interesting tasks keep students working at a lively pace. As one student said, 'The teachers are so friendly and they make learning very enjoyable.' Teachers provide clear explanations and use skilful questioning to check and develop students' knowledge and understanding. In most lessons, students are active and are encouraged to work independently. Teaching assistants are deployed well and they provide effective support. The use of assessment to inform learning is evident in most lessons and students are given clear guidance on how to improve their work. The highly effective features of the best lessons, such as the use of practical and visual learning strategies employed in science, are developing rapidly across all subjects but have yet to be embedded consistently in all lessons. However, the school's rigorous monitoring and assessment system ensures that underperformance is identified early and suitable intervention is provided to help students improve.

The school's outstanding curriculum is carefully planned to complement the range of learning opportunities in the first schools from which the students come and those in the upper school to which they subsequently go. It is broad, well planned and very successful in meeting the needs and interests of all students, as well as national requirements. Assessment data is used very well to help staff make decisions about student groupings and to ensure that the provision matches their needs. For example, students whose literacy skills are below average, particularly their ability to apply phonic skills and knowledge, are given highly effective additional support in smaller classes. Constant review of the curriculum ensures it reflects contemporary developments and good practice. The provision for modern foreign languages is strong and expanding. The school's specialist science status is beginning to have a beneficial impact on the curriculum through a number of themed days that combine learning in science with activities in other subjects. Students are very positive about the extensive enrichment and extended learning activities that the school offers them. The wide-ranging clubs, after-school activities, visits and visiting speakers contribute much to students' enjoyment and achievement.

All staff show high levels of commitment to students' care, guidance and support. The needs of individual students are responded to very effectively. Vulnerable students are supported extremely well through personalised programmes. The work undertaken by higher level teaching assistants to nurture small groups of students with social and emotional needs enhances this support very well. The school's pastoral systems provide a supportive environment that parents recognise and value. One parent wrote, 'I thank the staff for their nurture of my son, for recognising that he is capable of more and for their support on occasions when he has struggled.' Students' targets to help them improve their work are regularly reviewed and discussed with them. Child protection requirements and procedures are properly in place and the safeguarding of students is secure. Very strong links have been established with outside agencies to support the school's work and promote students' well-being. The students' adoption of healthy lifestyles, their excellent behaviour, the high level of participation in activities and their achievement are testament to the outstanding care, guidance and support they receive.

The headteacher and leadership team have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Self-evaluation is highly effective and accurate. Systematic and rigorous monitoring and evaluation are undertaken and used to help the school meet the challenging targets it sets itself. Thorough regular observation of lessons provides an accurate evaluation of teachers' performance. Assessment data is analysed well and used effectively to identify areas of underachievement. This leads to clear and successful intervention. Leaders and managers understand the context of the school's community very well and ensure that it makes a good contribution to community cohesion in the wider region and internationally. However, its contribution to community cohesion through developing students' understanding of the diversity of communities within Britain is more limited. The governors execute their responsibilities very competently. They provide highly effective support and challenge. The effectiveness of leadership and management is reflected in the successful way the key issues raised in the last inspection report have been addressed. The strength of leadership and management has increased, as seen in the many significant ways in which provision has improved. This shows that the school has outstanding capacity to develop further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the highly effective features of the best lessons, such as the use of practical and visual learning strategies employed in science, are developed more extensively across all subjects.
- Extend the opportunities for students to gain understanding of the diversity of communities within Britain.

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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?	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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	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

19 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Danesfield Church of England Voluntary Controlled Community Middle School, Taunton, TA4 4SW

Thank you for the help you gave my colleague and me when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting so many of you and learned a great deal from your comments.

You told us you enjoy your education very much and that school is a friendly and supportive place to learn. We think so too. It provides you with a good quality of education and has many outstanding features. From the time you enter the school to the end of Year 8, your progress and achievement are good. In Year 8, you attain high standards. The school is using well-devised methods to raise your performance in English, where results have not been as good as other subjects. The quality of teaching and learning is good, and sometimes outstanding. Your teachers plan well and use effective strategies to help you learn.

The school's strong Christian values and the way it makes you feel safe and confident have a very positive impact on your personal development and well-being, which are outstanding. Through your numerous roles and responsibilities in the school and through the contributions you make to the wider community, your personal qualities are developed very well. However, we judge you have a limited knowledge of the diversity of British communities. The quality of the care, guidance and support you receive is outstanding. Your teachers are highly committed to your welfare and ensuring that you all succeed whatever your talents and abilities are. The curriculum and the wide range of other activities you participate in are outstanding and meet your needs and interests very well.

The headteacher and senior teachers' very clear vision, strong direction and ability to bring about improvement underpin the school's success. We think they have outstanding capacity to make it even better. To raise achievement and standards further, we have asked them to ensure all groups of students in all subjects are helped to make the same progress as the best by using the very effective practical and visual ways of learning we saw in the best lessons, such as in science. We also asked that you be given the opportunities to enhance your understanding of other British communities.

Best wishes with your studies.

Nick Green Her Majesty's Inspector