

Sidmouth College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113503
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	331598
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Anthony Shield

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	864
Sixth form	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sylvia Martin
Headteacher	Jeremy Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2008
School address	Primley Road Sidmouth EX10 9LG
Telephone number	01395 514823
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Sidmouth College is smaller than most comprehensive schools. It draws its students from Sidmouth and the surrounding area. Most students are from a White British background, although there are small numbers of students from a range of other ethnic heritages. The proportion of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. Provision in the sixth form is shared and some teaching is carried out in collaboration with three partner schools. The school has specialist status in technology. At the last inspection in May 2008, the college was given a Notice to Improve. Improvements were required in raising the aspirations of students and teachers to improve achievements and standards; in improving the quality of leadership at all levels so that leaders can more effectively monitor the quality of provision and the impact of new assessment processes on students' progress; and in making more consistent use of assessment data to track students' progress accurately and ensure that students are helped to reach their full potential. A new principal joined the school in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Sidmouth College is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school. Driven by the dynamic leadership of the new principal, the college has made impressive gains in raising aspirations, improving leadership at all levels and in making more consistent use of assessment to improve students' standards and achievement. The sense of energy generated by the principal and his senior team has resulted in remarkable improvements in recent months. The college's ambition is clear and is one which all staff and students have adopted with enthusiasm. Staff have welcomed the clarity of vision. Students comment on how much harder they are having to work to meet the more challenging targets set for them. Parents have more confidence that their children will do well. This is because, as one parent said, there is now a 'culture of high expectation under the direction of a principal who is ambitious for every child and who knows how to make things happen'.

Students' standards are above average and, given their attainment on entry, their achievements are satisfactory. GCSE results in 2008 rose significantly and are set to continue to rise. While some variability in students' performance in different subjects remains, this is being tackled successfully. Higher expectations, more challenging targets, and better use of performance data to gear work to individual students' needs have been instrumental in 'raising the game'. Progress accelerates through Years 10 and 11 as students approach GCSE. It is not so consistent either in Years 7 to 9 or in the sixth form, where fewer students than might be expected achieve the higher grades.

Students speak well of their college. Friendly relationships characterise the college community. Students enjoy coming to college and attendance has been improving and is now just above average. Good personal development is encouraged by the good quality of care, guidance and support. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. Inconsistencies are being ironed out through effective strategies to share best practice. In particular, the use of more challenging targets is encouraging both students and teachers to aim higher. Many teachers adopt effective strategies to develop students' learning skills and independence, although this is not consistent. In addition, not all teachers plan work based on how well students are doing in order to challenge and motivate individual students, particularly in Years 7 to 9. The school's curriculum is good and offers much to make learning relevant and meaningful.

Leadership and management are good. Given a clear lead by the principal, managers at all levels are responding well. Their capacity to monitor and drive forward improvements has grown as trust and confidence in their abilities have developed. The school is making increasingly good use of its specialist status in technology to improve provision. Given what has already been achieved, the school has good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory, but there is some variability in the standards reached by students in different subjects. However, in most subjects, students perform in line with expectations. Not all students capable of reaching the higher grades do so, because teaching sometimes fails to offer enough challenge. Even so, teaching is satisfactory overall. Students enjoy the majority of their lessons, appreciating the more mature relationships and

intellectual approach to sixth form work. They do, nevertheless, comment on how some lessons lack variety or offer insufficient challenge. Students have a good knowledge of how well they are doing and how to improve their performance. They respect the commitment their teachers show and appreciate the time they give to caring for and supporting them. They conscientiously take on a range of responsibilities, such as mentoring younger students. As a result, their personal development is good. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school is rightly reconsidering the current arrangements for the management of the 14–19 curriculum to ensure a more coherent curriculum provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use assessment fully to give more challenge to individual students and provide consistently motivating tasks in lessons especially in Years 7 to 9.
- Ensure all teachers provide opportunities for students to be active and independent in their learning.
- Raise the standards and achievement of all students in the sixth form, particularly for those capable of achieving the higher grades.

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 their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

At GCSE, results improved markedly in 2008. Most impressive was the rise in the percentage achieving five or more A*-C grades from 60% in 2007 to 72% in 2008, and the rise in the percentage achieving five or more A*-C including English and mathematics, which increased from 46% to 66%. However, performance varied in different subjects. Good results in English, design and technology, geography, mathematics, science and religious education (RE), were not matched in other subjects, particularly French, German and history. While there was some underachievement amongst Year 9 students in 2008, particularly in English, improvements are evident as a result of the determination of the college to raise expectations through setting challenging targets. Students' progress through Years 7 to 9 is less good than in the GCSE years, but is nevertheless satisfactory. While girls do better than boys, the gap is narrowing. Students with learning difficulties make the same rate of progress as their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' good personal skills are a strength of the college. Good relationships amongst students and between students and staff encourage a positive and wholehearted contribution to life in the college. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Students identify with those who experience and overcome difficulties in life. They show their concern through charitable fundraising, and their increasing involvement in the local community. Their awareness of cultural diversity in Britain and their understanding of their responsibilities as global citizens are less well developed. Students develop their spirituality through thought-provoking issues in lessons. In this respect, RE plays a key part. Students' understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle is good. Most students behave well and with courtesy to others. This good behaviour is, on rare occasions, undermined by the mildly disruptive behaviour of a few students in lessons. A small minority of parents and students expressed concerns about this and its

impact on learning. Students are conscious of how to act safely, for example in science, and they say they feel safe, including from bullying. Good literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills mean that students are well prepared for their future working life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is improving as the college puts in place strategies to ensure more consistency. More rigorous monitoring and sharing of good practice has been effective in raising aspirations. Students themselves recognise that they now have to work harder to keep up and meet the challenging targets set. Much teaching is already good but there is still some variability. Many lessons involve a range of interesting tasks and activities which both excite and motivate students. As a result, and in these lessons, progress is rapid and learning purposeful. Some outstanding practice was observed. In one Year 9 ICT lesson, for example, all groups made exceptional progress because of the brisk pace and detailed probing questioning of the teacher. Well-focused peer assessment created an excellent climate for learning in which students were encouraged to think quickly and search for answers independently of the teacher. Less effective teaching offers students fewer opportunities to work in this way and to be active and independent learners. In addition, while the college now uses information on students' performance at a whole-college level with much more precision, not all teachers use assessment in lessons to pinpoint exactly how well individual students are learning and adapt their planning to match their individual needs. This is particularly the case in Years 7 to 9. Teaching assistants are used well to ensure all students feel included, supported and confident to achieve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well organised, meets statutory requirements and is relevant to the needs of different groups of students. Some imaginative features help ensure relevance. The Forest School project involves all Year 7 students in a residential experience which promotes cross-curricular learning. Local circumstances are also reflected in the rural dimension of the curriculum, and the college has recently won both local and national awards relating to the Year of Food and Farming. Despite its small size, the college offers a good range of vocational courses at GCSE and an innovative course for less able students in preparation for work. There are strong and active links with local employers, and the college recently achieved the Investors in Enterprise and Work Related Learning Standard in recognition of its good work in these areas. There is a particularly wide range of enrichment activities. Students value these, and participation rates are high.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Much effective work has been carried out since the last inspection to ensure students' academic progress is carefully monitored. An effective and robust system of tracking now provides all staff with an up-to-date and regular picture of how well students are doing. As a result, targets are set that result in students knowing what they are aiming for and support is put into place where needed. The needs of vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties are met

through well-targeted support and intervention. The personalised provision for students with autism and those with visual or physical impairments, for example, enables them to integrate fully into college life. Pastoral care continues to be good, and is central to the college's inclusive philosophy. Students feel well cared for on a daily basis. Child protection procedures are in place and staff checks meet government requirements. Guidance offered to students at key transition points is good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The new principal and his restructured senior leadership team have galvanised the college staff into new ways of thinking and a belief that every student deserves the best. This has already had a marked impact on the quality of provision and students' achievements. A strong commitment to further improvement is evident throughout the college, and its ambition is clear. Heads of department and heads of year have embraced change with enthusiasm, recognising that while they feel under more pressure, they also feel empowered and trusted to take the initiative. Whilst improvement is already evident, particularly in the use of assessment, the college knows there is more to be done before measures adopted impact fully on students' learning and achievement. Robust systems are now in place to track students' progress and increasingly effective use is made of performance data to set targets and match these to current progress. As a result, self-evaluation is much more realistic and provides a secure base to plan further improvement. Governors are well informed and proactive in their monitoring of the college's performance. The college's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory and it recognises that there is more to be done to shape students' understanding of their responsibilities beyond school. The college has made good use of its specialist status in technology to develop community links, particularly with local primary schools. Given the progress made since the last inspection, the college has a good capacity to improve further.

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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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	2	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
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	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**

22 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Sidmouth College, Sidmouth, Devon EX10 9LG

- Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us during our visit to your college. The college has come a long way since the last inspection one year ago, and has made some rapid and impressive improvements recently. While it currently offers you a satisfactory education overall, there are a number of good features. These are the main findings of our report.
- Standards in most subjects are above average. While many of you now make good progress, overall progress is satisfactory from your starting points in Year 7. Now that you are being set challenging targets to aim for, your progress is accelerating.
- Your good personal development and attitudes to learning are key factors in the improvements the college is making. Sixth formers are mature and good role models.
- Teaching is satisfactory and improving all the time.
- The school takes great care of you, ensuring you feel safe and well looked after.
- The principal and all the teachers are working successfully to make your school even better.
- Most of you behave well, and try hard to do your best.
- While standards and progress for those of you in the sixth form are satisfactory, they could be better, especially for those of you capable of reaching the higher grades.
- Teachers need to use information about how well each of you is doing in lessons to set work which is more closely geared to your individual needs and which really excites and interests you, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- We noticed how much more you learn when you participate in lessons actively and are given responsibility for solving problems on your own. We have asked the teachers to help by giving you more opportunities to do this.

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

Tony Shield

Lead inspector