

Exmouth Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113504
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	338188
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2668
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	531
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs E Lee
Headteacher	Mr A K Alexander
Date of previous school inspection	7 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 43 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at pupils' attainment over the past four years, at schemes of work, policies, the school improvement plan, reports from advisers working with the school, and at 551 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents, 162 responses to the pupils' questionnaire and 76 responses from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- attainment and progress in Key Stages 3 and 4, with particular attention to the achievement of less-able pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- achievement in the sixth form, the appropriateness of courses undertaken by students and the effectiveness with which independent learning is promoted
- the impact of the school's mathematics and computing specialism on the curriculum and on pupils' personal development.

Information about the school

This exceptionally large school operates on two sites connected by a footbridge. It is the only secondary school in Exmouth and is oversubscribed. An extended curriculum for about 60 pupils each year includes training at two local colleges. Fewer pupils are eligible for free school meals than is typical nationally and the number of pupils from minority ethnic groups is low. Very few are in the early stages of English language acquisition. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is smaller than the national average; most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties or language and communication issues. More pupils enter or leave the school part-way through their secondary school education than is typical nationally. An on-site nursery is managed by the school. In 2004, the school gained specialist status for mathematics and computing.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Under the dynamic, purposeful and effective direction of the principal and the senior leadership team, this wide-ability school provides a good education for all of its many pupils. Links with parents and carers and with the wider community are exceptionally strong and productive. An overwhelming majority of the parents who responded to the questionnaire expressed confidence in the school's management and felt happy with the opportunities and experience offered to their children. Most striking is the strong sense of community within the school and the pride taken by pupils and by staff in its variety of activity and achievement. Analysis and evaluation by senior leaders of the school's recent progress and of current strengths and areas for development are well grounded. There is clear evidence that coherent strategies to raise standards, to improve teaching and to add breadth and variety to the curriculum are having a positive impact, which indicates that the capacity for continuing improvement is good.

The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has risen steadily over recent years to be higher than the national average. About 10% of pupils from Year 10 upwards benefit from a wider curriculum, taught in partnership with two local colleges. This enables them to develop a range of practical skills and to gain vocational accreditations that equip them well for further training or employment. Progress for all pupils across Years 7 to 11 is good. A great strength of the school's outstanding curriculum is that it engages pupils of widely differing abilities and aspirations, with challenging but achievable goals well tailored to pupils' individual needs and potential. The school's leaders are, rightly, reviewing provision for less-academic pupils to ensure that their accreditations have the same degree of recognition as GCSEs and some vocational courses.

The school's leaders and managers have established rigorous analysis of information about standards and progress, and this has led to a more consistent setting of targets to maximise pupils' attainment in national assessments. Clear lines of accountability and a well-targeted programme of professional development have strengthened much, but not yet all, middle management. The school has a realistic view of the quality of teaching; its assessment matched inspectors' finding that 75% was good or better. The best teaching seen combined confident and enthusiastic subject knowledge with intelligent planning, lively pace, good questioning skills and well-judged use of technology. Less-effective lessons offered fewer opportunities for pupils to be active and independent learners and had limited scope for self- and peer-review as a basis for the next steps to be taken.

Pupils are courteous, well motivated and generally confident. They take extremely seriously the need to be healthy and are emphatic that they feel entirely safe. They

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respond with impressive enthusiasm to opportunities to take on responsibility both within and beyond the school. The pastoral care given to all is outstanding, extended through links with external agencies whenever appropriate. The pattern of retention and achievement in the sixth form, however, indicates that these students are not always guided towards courses that best match their capabilities. Sixth form managers recognise that progress and attainment in the sixth form are currently satisfactory. There is a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve provision and outcomes for those not best served by AS- and A-level options. Sixth formers are very comfortable with the care and guidance they receive, but only a few develop quickly as independent learners.

A shining strand through the school is its mathematics and computing specialism. Inspirational leadership and management have made specialist status a positive agent for change. The school has been exceptionally enterprising in developing links with the community and highly effective in combining technology with creative thinking across the curriculum to enhance pupils' opportunities for learning and for personal development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further drive up standards by:
 - ensuring that all middle leaders match the high standards of the best with regard to the management of teaching and learning, and by rigorously monitoring the process
 - raising attainment and improving the progress of sixth form students by developing their independent learning and study skills.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils enter the school with broadly average attainment and follow courses through which they make good progress, whatever their ability and aspirations. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress as well and as willingly as their contemporaries, taking positive advantage of appropriate courses and responding well to individual mentoring. Pupils voiced their appreciation of the additional support given to those preparing for national assessments, and in the lessons observed during the inspection demonstrated their positive attitudes to learning. They were seen to be well motivated, responsive and conscientious, but they were often too dependent upon direction from teachers, and not habitually posing questions or developing their own thinking through investigation and reflection.

The school has a very strong culture of mutual respect, underpinned by accessible and effective support for anyone in difficulty, so pupils feel extremely safe. They treat each other with consideration and, apart from some lapses in concentration, behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils show an extremely knowledgeable and active commitment to healthy living. Their involvement in the development of healthy options

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in the school canteen and their high level of participation in sports and activities are impressive. Sixth formers and younger pupils respond exceptionally well to opportunities to take on responsibility within school and to contribute to the wider community by, for example, working with primary school children and creating allotments for the elderly. The school council is extremely well respected and influential. Its members are confident and unusually enterprising, for example presenting their case for extended provision to a meeting of the county council.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Parents and pupils expressed great confidence in the commitment and competence of teachers and support staff. Typical was this comment from a pupil: 'The teachers here are good and have your best interests at heart.' The majority of teaching observed during the inspection was good or better, with common strengths reflecting the impact of focused training. Lesson plans clearly identified what was to be learnt and a succession of activities was carefully designed to lead pupils from one step to the next. The needs and potential of pupils within a class were broadly dealt with but there was

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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not always sufficiently detailed attention to how diverse abilities and learning styles could be challenged as well as supported. In the most successful lessons observed, teachers radiated a confidence and enthusiasm that kept pupils engaged, asked open questions to encourage thinking, prompted pupils to show initiative, moved from one activity to the next without slackening the pace of learning, used a range of technology with flair and allowed time to check and consolidate pupils' understanding. In lessons where pace and variety of presentation flagged, pupils lost concentration. Some opportunities were missed for pupils to learn from each other and from reflection on their own performance, or to explore an independent line of thought individually and in groups.

The curriculum is exceptionally dynamic and flexible, and able to reflect and develop pupils' very wide range of ability and aspiration. It offers positive choice through a variety of pathways, extended through links with local colleges and businesses. Each pathway equips pupils with appropriate knowledge and skills for the next stage in their learning or employment. The school's culture ensures equality of esteem across the full academic and vocational range. The mathematics and computing specialism has not only prompted imaginative investment in and use of technology to enhance teaching and learning but has also driven initiatives such as the teaching of information and communication technology in French. The extra-curricular programme makes a hugely positive contribution to pupils' learning and personal development, through subject-based options such as Latin and Greek, skills such as life-guarding and 'signing' and an impressive range of team and individual sports and arts-based activities.

Responses to inspection questionnaires indicate that parents and pupils place extremely high value on the care, guidance and support provided by the school: 'Despite its immense size, I feel strongly that my child is treated like an individual.' Many examples were given of the school's success in supporting those with specific needs or disabilities, such as, 'My daughter has challenging behaviour. She is encouraged to push herself, rewarded and praised and her self-esteem has flourished.' Transition arrangements for pupils coming into Year 7 are exemplary. Links with their primary schools, well planned induction days and careful support in their early weeks enable most new pupils to arrive confidently and settle quickly. One of the deputy principals leads a highly effective pastoral team. Vulnerable pupils are sensitively monitored and record-keeping is thorough and secure. Whenever appropriate, home visits establish links with parents and carers to ensure that there is continuity and consistency of support. The team works closely with a range of agencies and makes a significant contribution to case conferences and decisions affecting the school's most 'at risk' pupils. Intelligent and well-coordinated pastoral care for all pupils is an outstanding strength of the school.

Less consistently successful is the guidance for pupils planning their sixth form choices. Sixth formers' uneven levels of attainment and the relatively high 'drop out' rate in some subjects indicate that not all have been encouraged to opt for courses that really match their abilities and priorities. Pupils currently in Year 10, however, are comfortable with the courses they are following and confident that these will provide a sound foundation for their future choices.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Strategic planning and day-to-day decisions are shaped by the determination of leaders and managers to ensure that levels of attainment continue to rise for all pupils, whether they are following an academic or a work-based pathway. There is now a disciplined approach to the school's finances which enables the leadership to set priorities confidently and cost-effectively. Meticulous analysis of examination results and of pupils' progress ensures that the school's leaders have a very clear picture of overall achievement. A clearly articulated and ambitious vision is understood and supported throughout the school but its implementation is still uneven, reflecting differences in the effectiveness of middle managers. Well-defined lines of accountability have been established to address this. Each department is overseen by a member of the senior team and performance management is linked to pupils' achievement. The senior leadership team sets a brisk pace in the monitoring of teaching and learning, with lesson observations given a specific focus and any observed weaknesses promptly tackled. This is having a positive impact.

Equality of opportunity and esteem are exceptionally well promoted, especially through the design and management of an outstandingly inclusive curriculum. For each pupil there are persuasive and productive options and the school ensures that parents and carers are kept extremely well informed about ways in which they can support their child's progress along the most appropriate pathway. Discussions with staff and with pupils across all key stages made it clear that the culture of mutual respect is strongly embedded as a bastion against discrimination. On both sites pupils with physical disabilities have access to the full curriculum. Effective procedures to ensure that pupils are kept safe and secure, including those relating to child protection, are in place and well understood at all levels of this exceptionally cohesive school. The school's wide-ranging outreach programme, largely driven by its role as a specialist college and schemes such as the LINX partnership, ensures that pupils understand and value their place within the local community. The international dimension is well supported by the curriculum, by themed activities weeks and by opportunities for some pupils to visit, for example, the Himalayas, Peru and Germany. Pupils' understanding of their place in modern multicultural Britain is less well developed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Since the last Ofsted inspection, the school has re-absorbed the on-site nursery provision for 30 children. This self-contained unit is fully compliant with registration requirements and is staffed by a highly qualified team, creating a safe, stimulating and happy environment. It serves the local community well and supports children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Well managed, up-to-date provision and practices are seen here and outcomes for all the children are good. The Nursery also contributes to the school as a whole by providing 'real life' situations for older pupils following a variety of courses and by the engaging presence of very young children taking their daily walks around the site.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

Sixth form students are courteous, considerate, helpful and generally happy with their school experience. Their behaviour is invariably good and often outstanding. They feel

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safe and have a strong sense of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Students do a great deal for charity and clearly enjoy making contributions to their community. They speak well of their school's diversity and of their genuine appreciation of cultural differences.

There is an open-access policy for entry to the sixth form. The school acknowledges that, although attainment in the sixth form has risen steadily, it is still low. Where low attainment coincides with a high 'drop out' rate it indicates that students have opted for subjects that do not match their capabilities and learning styles, although the curriculum offers diverse choice. Well-managed assessment helps students understand where they are and where they need to be. They also know what they need to do to improve their work further; however, the benefits are not yet apparent in terms of examination results. Students do better at A-level as they develop more effective study skills than they do in their Year 12 AS courses. They feel that teachers are helpful and patient and encourage ambition. Teaching seen during the inspection was never less than satisfactory and often good. Sixth form leadership is satisfactory. There is a commitment to helping students of all abilities do as well as possible, but leaders also recognise that opportunities for independent learning are not sufficient to help students improve their learning habits. Recent initiatives to resolve this weakness have not yet had sufficient impact to bring attainment up to the national average.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers have responded very positively to the improvements in provision and outcomes for their children. A few expressed concerns about behaviour and felt that school-home communication was not always prompt or entirely helpful, but most were confident that their children were safe and behaviour well managed. They appreciated the trouble taken by the school to keep them well informed and to offer guidance on how they could best help their children to make the most of the opportunities offered. Inspection findings supported the generally positive view of the school presented by most parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Exmouth Community College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 551 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 2668 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	199	36	317	58	26	5	6	1
The school keeps my child safe	213	39	315	57	16	3	4	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	178	32	315	57	37	7	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	159	29	337	61	27	5	4	1
The teaching is good at this school	161	29	348	63	22	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	145	26	348	63	49	9	2	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	119	22	364	66	53	10	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	166	30	320	58	20	4	2	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	154	28	355	64	22	4	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	206	37	278	50	39	7	11	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	84	15	360	65	51	9	6	1
The school is led and managed effectively	275	50	242	44	15	3	6	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	252	46	272	49	18	3	2	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



6 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Exmouth Community College, Exmouth EX8 3AF

We greatly appreciated your cheerful readiness to answer our questions and show us your work when we visited your school. I welcome this opportunity to let you know about the judgements we reached.

Yours is a good school. You are being taught well, and you are willing learners. Amongst your school's particular strengths are the care and support you are given and the opportunities you have to contribute to important decision-making. We could see that you have an excellent understanding of the importance of keeping healthy and were pleased to find that you feel very safe in school. We agree that your principal has had a very positive impact on all aspects of your school, with support from the governors, from staff and from you and your families. You spoke of the respect with which you are treated and we agree that this is the key to your school's culture of mutual support and acceptance of differences. We were impressed by the way in which your school's specialist subjects have improved aspects of your learning and led to an outstanding variety of links with local schools and groups, which bring important benefits to all.

To support your school's continuing improvement, we have asked your principal to make sure that:

- the management and monitoring of teaching and learning in all departments are as good as those seen in the best
- sixth formers are helped to become more independent and skilful learners to improve their levels of attainment and rate of progress.

You can help by making the most of opportunities to contribute your own ideas in lessons and to learn from the contributions of others in your group.

Yours faithfully

Patricia Metham

Her Majesty's Inspector

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