

South Dartmoor Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113519
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	338194
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Karl Sampson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
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	1648
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	300
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul McCormack
Headteacher	Ray Tarleton
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2007
School address	Balland Lane Ashburton Newton Abbot
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 45 lessons, observed 37 teachers and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning documents, external evaluations of the school's work, policy documents and students' work. They also scrutinised 310 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, and questionnaires completed by staff and a sample of students from each year group.

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

- the consistency in the quality of teaching to ensure high levels of progress for all students and, in particular, for boys and students with special educational needs
- the impact of the curriculum and care, guidance and support in promoting outstanding outcomes for all students
- the contribution to school improvement of partnerships, the sports specialism and training school status
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels in embedding ambition and driving improvement and how this demonstrates outstanding capacity for further improvement
- the quality of provision and leadership and management and their impact on student outcomes in the sixth form.

Information about the school

South Dartmoor Community College is a larger than average rural comprehensive school with a large sixth form. It serves a large, dispersed and somewhat isolated catchment area covering over 350 square miles. Most students are of White British heritage and the vast majority speak English as their first language. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above that found nationally. Their needs include specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) and social, emotional and behavioural issues. The proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs is slightly above the national average. The college has held sports specialist status since 1997 was designated as a training school in 2001 and became a trust school in 2007.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

South Dartmoor Community College is an outstanding college with an ethos of high aspiration and success for all, underpinned by a dynamic culture of learning and continuous improvement. As a result, students and staff flourish in an environment that embodies a strong sense of community, responsibility and inclusion. Thanks to the high quality curriculum, care, advice and guidance that the school provides, students are able to access a wide range of opportunities to enhance their learning and personal development. Consequently, students' outcomes - their achievement and the wider aspects of their personal development - are all at least good; most are outstanding. The college is in a strong position to continue and accelerate this improvement because:

- the principal provides a clear vision for the college and he drives improvement resolutely and with the best interests of the pupils in mind. Together with a strong senior leadership team, he has improved further what was an already good college.
- self-evaluation is strong at all levels and is based on secure data which results in accurate appraisal of provision, with the setting of challenging targets, and informs appropriate plans for future development.
- students are known as individuals and challenged to give of their best; their successes are celebrated and their needs are met through carefully targeted intervention and support.
- comprehensive systems are in place to support the continuing professional development of all staff, many are engaged in practitioner research to drive further improvements in teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning is good overall and some lessons observed were outstanding. Astute monitoring by college leaders and training school status has enabled a sharp focus on classroom practice and on developing the quality of learning across the college. Teachers use well developed knowledge of their subjects, and of how children learn, to engage and to foster students' interest and motivation in lessons and learning. This was evident in many of the lessons observed, although opportunities to work independently were not developed fully in all lessons. There are some outstanding lessons which are characterised by challenging activities and underpinned by regular, precise oral and written feedback which engages students in a dialogue about how to improve their work. However, this excellent practice is not embedded consistently across the school. The students are very proud of their college and spoke eloquently and with great respect and affection for their teachers, who they believe work very hard on their behalf. As a result, the quality of relationships is superb, behaviour is excellent and the college community has a great sense of cohesion and unity of purpose. The curriculum is outstanding because it gives students the opportunity to excel in ways appropriate to

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their individual strengths and interests. It is significantly enhanced by the college's expert use of its sports specialism and training school status. For example, students gain hugely from teaching children in other schools, sharing their knowledge and passion for learning. As a result, they are keen to embrace new challenges, cultures and experiences which also contribute to the promotion of excellent wider community cohesion.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure outstanding progress for all groups of students, including the sixth form, by driving further improvements to the quality of teaching by:
 - using the best practice in the school to develop teachers' professional skills and teaching strategies so that learning experiences consistently provide high levels of challenge for all students
 - extending the use of effective questioning and dialogue to stimulate students' active participation in all lessons, with more opportunities for students to contribute their ideas to drive the learning forward
 - ensuring consistency in the use of day-to-day assessment across all subjects so that students understand precisely what the subject-specific actions for improvement are, and how to achieve them.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

In the large majority of lessons observed, students made good progress, enjoyed their learning and engaged enthusiastically with a wide range of activities. This was most evident in lessons which actively involved students and encouraged them to be co-constructors in their learning. These lessons were skilfully designed to challenge and interest every student, regardless of ability.

Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers. Teaching assistants and teachers communicate well to ensure that each student receives good targeted support.

GCSE examination results have improved over the last three years and are now above average in most subjects. However, in 2009 the progress made by boys fell below that of girls. Senior leaders acted swiftly, and improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and a sharply focused intervention programme have helped to even out the gap in achievement.

Analysis of the current Key Stage 4 results and standards seen in lessons and books demonstrate that all groups of students are now making at least good progress. The school's latest data suggest that students currently in Years 10 and 11 are well placed to achieve their challenging targets.

Outcomes in the specialist sports subjects are outstanding. The specialism makes a significant contribution to the development of students' leadership skills. Students' aspirations are constantly being challenged and raised and, last year, the number of

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students who left school and who were not in education, employment or training was well below the national average.

Students behave extremely well in lessons and around the school. They are courteous to visitors and each other and feel very safe in school. They say that bullying is rare and dealt with effectively.

Opportunities for students to contribute to the school and wider community are extensive and diverse, and participation rates are extremely high for all groups. Students raise substantial sums of money for local, national and global causes and are involved in an impressive range of activities in sport, the performing arts and cultural exchanges.

Students demonstrate excellent engagement with the local community through their leadership of sports clubs and sports festivals for local primary schools.

Significant improvements in departments are made as a result of the students work in evaluating learning.

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	1
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The way in which the school cares for and supports students is an important strength

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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and students display very high levels of trust in the adults around them. Performance leaders play a key role in ensuring that, despite the school's size, every student is known as an individual and able to achieve.

The excellent links to external agencies complement a coherent and integrated approach to ensure the well-being of all students, especially the most vulnerable.

The curriculum provides memorable experiences and rich opportunities for high quality learning and wider personal development and well-being. Overseas links with Brazil and Africa, and cultural exchanges with Thailand and France, are much appreciated by students. They describe the curriculum as being both 'brilliant' and challenging because 'it pushes us to the limit' with its quality, range and depth of opportunity. Its impact is seen in the rising levels of attainment and students' enjoyment in school.

The school collaborates with a wide range of partners to extend and improve the curriculum offer so that it is highly personalised, motivates students and raises their aspirations. The range of academic and vocational qualifications, complemented by excellent extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities is central to the outstanding outcomes for students.

The school accurately evaluates the quality of teaching as good. The large majority of lessons observed were good or better and no inadequate lessons were seen during the inspection.

At its best, teaching is inspiring. Inspectors saw some superb learning, where learning moves along briskly, questions are probing and tasks are creative, imaginative and challenging. As a result, students' interest is captured and they articulate ideas fluently and with confidence, regardless of ability.

Less effective lessons, where progress is satisfactory, typically have the following characteristics:

- a tendency for teachers to over-direct proceedings, and too few opportunities for students to generate questions and ideas of their own
- learning activities that are not challenging or do not match the needs of all students and are slow paced
- questioning that rarely delves deep in order to check and challenge fully students' understanding or develop learning further.

Marking and assessment vary in quality. They are at their best in English, music, physical education and religious studies because teachers provide precise subject-specific guidance which clearly identifies what students need to do to improve their work. In other cases, guidance is of limited value and simply confirms that students have completed work, corrects what they have written, or provides general comments.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<p>The quality of teaching</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning</p>	<p>2</p>

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	
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The principal is outstanding in his leadership and vision for the college which is shared, supported and implemented by staff, governors and students. He is ably supported by a strong leadership team.

Teamwork and collegiality are evident throughout the college and morale is very high. Although this is an institution which thrives on innovation, it is also strongly self-evaluative and uses its monitoring effectively to hold people to account.

The college makes outstanding use of its partnerships to promote learning and well-being. For example, work with the University of Exeter has enhanced the school's high quality professional development programme and enabled staff and students to develop their own 'Educational Research in the Classroom' (ERIC). As a result, the quality of teaching is improving as a dialogue of effective learning and classroom practice is developed and shared more widely.

The college promotes equality of opportunity strongly through policies and procedures which ensure that outcomes and experiences for all students are fair and positive.

The college has successfully engendered a cohesive community, where all members show respect and tolerance for others. In addition, there is a highly effective strategy in place for engaging with communities outside of the college, particularly through the work of specialist subjects, deep learning days and extensive international links.

Governors provide great support and a good level of challenge. Their confidence and expertise in evaluating the performance of the college in relation to national expectations, and in holding it to account, are growing.

As part of the high quality care the college takes of the students, appropriate procedures are in place to ensure their safety and that current safeguarding requirements are met. However, this is not consistently applied across all risk assessments. The college is working hard to bring these up to the level of the best.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The school has an inclusive approach in promoting further studies for all students. Learning and progress are good and improving and there are clear indications of strong capacity for sustained improvement in the future.

Strong leadership by the head of sixth form has been an important factor in strengthening systems for monitoring student and subject performance. Underperformance in a small number of subjects is being tackled successfully and, consequently, after a slight dip in 2008, attainment is rising.

Teaching and assessment is good overall. The school is presently focused on strategies to raise achievement further, including the sharper use of assessment data to ensure that sufficient challenge is provided for all students, across all subjects.

The range of A-level and vocational courses on offer is rich, extensive and able to meet the needs of all learners. Students value the extensive range of support from their teachers. They greatly enjoy life in the sixth form and develop into confident, outgoing and mature individuals.

Retention and attendance rates are strong and are evidence of students' enjoyment of the sixth form. Students are well advised about higher education, training and employment options, and have high expectations for the future.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire, a very large majority showed that they were highly satisfied with the quality of education and care that the school provides. They believe that the school is well led and are particularly appreciative of the quality of teaching and the progress being made by their children. Parents and

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carers also identified the school's arrangements to keep their children safe, healthy and able to enjoy school as other areas of note. A number of parents and carers raised concerns about behaviour in some lessons as well as the school's effectiveness in communicating information and how well it responds to suggestions or concerns. The inspection team judged that behaviour was excellent in and around the school, thanks to the highly effective provision and procedures that are in place. Inspectors appreciate that any lapse in communication is a concern for those involved but consider that the school works hard to communicate with parents and carers and to act upon their views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at South Dartmoor 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 310 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1648 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	106	34	177	57	23	7	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	81	26	210	68	11	4	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	78	25	186	60	41	13	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	83	27	203	65	18	6	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	80	26	207	67	13	4	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	54	17	185	60	60	19	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	77	25	212	68	17	5	0	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)	64	21	207	67	13	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	71	23	208	67	18	6	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	61	20	168	54	52	17	11	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	39	13	190	61	38	12	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	87	28	195	63	11	4	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	104	34	189	61	12	4	2	1

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



29 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of South Dartmoor Community College, Newton Abbot, TQ13 7EW

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and learning about the work of your college, which we have judged to be outstanding.

The college's ethos and dynamic culture of learning and continuous improvement are excellent. We were particularly impressed by your behaviour and your very positive attitudes to learning. As a result, relationships between staff and students are superb. You make good academic progress over your time at the college and enjoy your education because of the consistently good teaching. The excellent curriculum provides you with a fantastic range of opportunities, both in and out of the college, and you told us how much you appreciate such a 'brilliant' curriculum offer. You particularly appreciate the positive benefits that sports status has brought in terms of helping you to prepare successfully for life beyond school and developing your leadership qualities. The high quality care, guidance and support help you to gain outstanding outcomes in many other aspects of your personal development.

Although the college is already outstanding, staff are committed to continuing the college's improvement and are all ambitious to make it even better in the future. The college already knows its strengths and, for areas that are not as strong, there are plans in place to keep the college moving forward.

In order to improve the college further, we have asked the college to focus on improving teaching so all groups of students make outstanding progress. We have asked that teachers share ideas and learning from each other so that lessons consistently provide you with challenging learning activities which engage you more actively in learning and allow you to contribute more. We have also asked that teachers consistently give you high quality feedback on your work so that you always know exactly what you need to do to improve in each subject.

You can certainly help your teachers with some of these things.

Very best wishes for your future happiness and success.

Yours sincerely

Karl Sampson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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