

South Molton Community College

Old Alswear Road, South Molton, Devon EX36 4LA

Inspection dates

18–19 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Outcomes are good. Pupils try hard and want to do well in all their subjects. They achieve especially well in mathematics.
- There is a good focus on the learning of disadvantaged pupils. As a result, the progress made by these pupils is speeding up, particularly in younger year groups.
- The work of teachers and teaching assistants helps disabled pupils and those with special educational needs to make good progress.
- Pupils are very well prepared for their next steps after leaving school. Through the curriculum, the links with business and enterprise enhance the guidance and support that pupils receive.
- By and large, teaching is good. Most teaching has high expectations of pupils' achievement.
- Pupils learn well where teaching provides good challenge. Most of the feedback that pupils receive helps them to improve their work.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. They show very positive attitudes to learning. Pupils' conduct around the school is particularly impressive.
- A strength of the school is that pupils are known as individuals. Staff have a good understanding of any gaps in pupils' learning.
- The Principal provides strong and committed leadership. His drive to improve the school is unwavering. Supported by his leadership team, he has taken a number of important steps to speed up improvement.
- Leaders are working well to improve teaching. They have taken effective steps to minimise the disruption caused by changes to staffing in the English department.
- The governing body is very supportive of the school. Members of the governing body are improving their skills as 'critical friends'.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teaching provides high levels of challenge. Sometimes, pupils' progress is not as strong as it could be.
- Achievement in English is not as high as it is in mathematics. This is because teaching in mathematics is stronger than it is in English.
- Some leaders of subject areas do not have the skills they need to lead improvements to teaching. As a result, teaching is improving more quickly in some subjects than in others.
- The school's strategic plans lack precise targets and checkpoints. This means that senior leaders and governors find it difficult to check the impact of the actions being taken, or understand if the school is improving quickly enough.
- Leaders' evaluation of the impact of pupil premium funding is not always sharp enough. Governors cannot easily check which actions are having the most impact.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement, including for disadvantaged pupils, by:
 - ensuring that all teaching provides good levels of challenge, particularly in English
 - sharpening the evaluation of the impact of pupil premium funding so that the most effective strategies can be identified more easily
 - improving the skills of subject leaders to lead improvements to teaching.

- Improve the quality of strategic planning and the impact of the work of the governing body by:
 - ensuring that actions in strategic plans are tightly linked to more precise impact measures and timescales
 - identifying appropriate checkpoints, so that leaders and governors can more easily assess progress and amend plans and actions as needed.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- This is a caring school where pupils are known as individuals. In this school, the Principal sets the tone and leads through his example. He models the mutual respect he expects from the school community, greeting each pupil by name as he walks through the school. He has quickly secured the support of staff, who are firmly behind the drive for improvement and his vision for the future.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness and what needs to be done to speed up improvement. The Principal is correct in his view that, in recent years, improvement at the school had begun to stall; although much of its work remained strong, outcomes in other schools had started to catch up.
- Leaders have not shirked from this challenge and have tackled the changes needed with much energy and determination. The impact of these actions can be seen in outcomes and leadership in mathematics, and in recent improvements to examination results in subjects such as history. Supported through the pupil premium, both the attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils are also rising. Nevertheless, to maintain this momentum, leaders rightly recognise that more needs to be done to fully consolidate the progress made.
- Many of the systems at the school have been improved. Leaders now have a more detailed understanding of pupils' behaviour, attendance and progress. They are beginning to use this information to evaluate the impact of the actions they have taken. A recently introduced approach to marking and feedback is having a good impact on pupils' learning, although this is not yet universally the case.
- Improvements in the use of management information have not yet fed through fully into strategic planning. While plans show the actions to be completed and the broad outcomes expected, they do not allow leaders and governors to judge the impact of actions and the rate of progress being made. This makes it more difficult for governors to hold school leaders to account for improvements to the school's effectiveness.
- Considerable strides have been made to strengthen accountability across the school. Appraisal objectives for staff are more tightly tied to pupils' achievement and improvements to teaching. The training and support for staff are now sharply focused on teachers' strengths and areas for development. Robust action is taken where teaching is 'not good enough for South Molton'. Leaders have taken effective action to minimise the impact of disruption to staffing in English.
- Good plans are in place to improve teaching. These are rooted in leaders' consideration of research evidence and the observation of teaching and leadership in other schools. Leaders in subject areas are also supporting improvements, but not all have the skills they need to lead teaching more effectively. This means that teaching is improving more quickly in some subject areas than in others.
- The curriculum is designed to meet the needs of pupils, whether academic or vocational. There is a strong focus on links with business and enterprise, and on ensuring equality of access and opportunity. A wealth of extra-curricular activities supports this aspiration well and these are greatly valued by pupils. A good number of international and cultural links, such as with Nepal, are effective in raising pupils' awareness of communities different to their own. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- Through elections to the school council as well as the Youth Parliament, pupils learn about the importance of democracy and free speech. The school council ensures that pupils have a voice about issues that matter to them and the Principal speaks with pupils regularly to hear their views.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are very supportive of the school and care deeply about its success. Leaders have worked hard to fill vacancies on the governing body and there is now a good range of skills and experiences represented. Presentations to governors by members of staff provide a useful perspective on different aspects of the school's work. A recent whole-school evaluation, carried out by the Co-operative Schools Trust, has enabled governors to become more searching in their analysis of performance.
 - Governors are now much more informed about the effectiveness of the school and they are better placed to ask challenging questions about what is being done to speed up improvement. Nevertheless, sometimes their ability to hold leaders to account is limited by the information available. For example, the analysis of the use of pupil premium funding does not always make clear the impact of specific strategies, so governors are not able to understand which are having the most or least impact.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The safeguarding team at the school ensure that training is up to date and that staff understand their roles and responsibilities clearly. This extends to non-teaching staff, including, for example, those who work in the school's canteen. A recent focus on the risks of radicalisation and extremism has included work with staff and pupils. Record keeping is thorough and the support for vulnerable children involves appropriate external agencies, including parents and families. The follow-up to any concerns is timely and rigorous. The culture of the school is such that pupils are also trusted to take responsibility for sharing any concerns they may have. The school's work to support any pupils who are looked after is assiduous and detailed, including a good focus on their attendance, achievement and overcoming barriers to their success.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. In most lessons, pupils listen attentively, try hard and produce good work. Learning in the school is very well promoted through the highly positive relationships between pupils and staff.
- Most teaching has high expectations of the effort and progress that pupils make. Pupils are encouraged to contribute their ideas and to support the learning of others. Teaching assistants adapt the approaches they use, working with different pupils around the class, checking understanding and moving on learning.
- Where pupils learn best, activities are carefully chosen to provide good levels of challenge, including for the most able. Lessons are purposeful and productive and pupils' work shows they persevere and make good progress.
- This good progress is very often supported through the use of information about how well pupils are doing, and where there are gaps in their learning. For example, in mathematics, diagnostic assessment information helps teachers to pinpoint where pupils lack important skills and understanding. Using this information, catch-up activities are introduced and the planning for the next phase of lessons is adapted and targeted.
- Most of the time, pupils receive useful feedback about their learning. In some subjects, such as in religious education, the marking of pupils' work is very effective in helping them to make improvements and to understand how to reach higher grades. Not all marking does this well; sometimes, pupils receive too little feedback about the quality of the work they have completed, and how it could be improved.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is invariably good. This means that teachers can help pupils to learn well and to ensure that lessons are interesting and enjoyable. However, not all teaching makes the best use of this good behaviour to push pupils' learning on more rapidly.
- Where learning is weaker, teaching does not challenge or involve all pupils. Learning is not always checked carefully enough to make sure that all pupils are ready to move on to new work, or on to more challenging learning. Sometimes pupils do not produce good-quality work because they are unclear about how to do so, or because the work they are doing is too straightforward or repeats what they already know or can do.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils value the 'homely' feel of the school and its friendly, welcoming atmosphere. Older pupils are good role models for younger pupils in their tutor groups. Prefects take their responsibilities very seriously and make a good contribution to school life.
- Pupils say that bullying is very rare and that they have confidence in adults whom they can turn to. They also feel it is helpful to talk to older pupils who are 'anti-bullying ambassadors', should the need arise.
- Support for pupils' welfare and well-being, including with any mental health issues, is particularly effective. Pupils are confident they feel safe in school and that they are well cared for. They have a good understanding of the potential dangers of mobile technologies, social media and the internet.
- The quality of advice and guidance is good. It is closely tailored to the needs and aspirations of pupils and is successful in promoting a wide range of opportunities and future pathways. For example, as a result of work to encourage access and equality of opportunity, a higher than average proportion of girls take up courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) when they leave school.

- Overall attendance is broadly average, and persistent absence is declining. The actions taken by leaders to improve attendance have been particularly successful in reducing the absence of disadvantaged pupils. Work with external agencies, and with parents, has been a key part in this success.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They respect their school, their uniform and each other. Pupils look after the school site and there is very little litter in rooms, corridors and open spaces. Canteen staff and bus drivers all praised the good conduct and attitudes of pupils at the school.
- Poor behaviour is unusual, and few pupils are excluded from school. Although pupils feel that disruption to learning is very rare, they say that in a few lessons, pupils chatting or turning round can get in the way of learning.
- Pupils referred to the 'hub' are helped to re-engage quickly in learning. However, leaders are not routinely using information they collect about these referrals, or about any bullying incidents, to analyse patterns and to identify trends.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Overall, outcomes for pupils are good. They achieve especially well in mathematics and make good progress across a broad range of subjects. Staff keep a close eye on how well pupils are doing and make sure help is provided where this is needed. This knowledge of pupils as individuals is a particular strength of the school.
- Almost all pupils enter employment, education or training when they leave school. Through the curriculum, there is a strong focus on developing their skills for life and work. A range of business and enterprise links further enhances pupils' experiences in Key Stage 3.
- Pupils work hard and want to do well in all their subjects. They take a good deal of pride in their work and many read well and write confidently and convincingly at length. Most teaching ensures a consistent focus on pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils are expected to present their work neatly, although some boys do not take enough care in ensuring that their work is always the best they can do.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress. Any weaknesses in pupils' reading and writing skills are accurately identified and good support is provided. In lessons, teaching assistants and other adults take care to make sure they balance their direct support with building pupils' skills to think and work confidently for themselves.
- Pupils learn well when teaching challenges them and expectations are high. In most subjects, teachers use targets and assessment information effectively to make sure the most-able pupils are supported to reach the highest grades at GCSE.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving and many are now making the same progress as other pupils. This is particularly the case in younger year groups. Funding provided through the pupil premium is helping pupils to catch up with learning they may have missed. However, despite the good overall impact of this funding, leaders and governors do not check carefully enough on how much difference particular strategies and interventions are making.
- Most teaching makes good use of information about how well pupils are doing. This is particularly the case in mathematics; any gaps in pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are quickly identified and used to adapt teaching in future lessons. Results in GCSE mathematics rose sharply in 2015.
- Achievement in English is not as high as in mathematics. This is because teaching and leadership in English are not as consistently strong. In their comments to inspectors, some parents felt that their child's progress in English could be better. Inspection evidence confirms that senior leaders are taking effective action to make sure that outcomes in English improve.

School details

Unique reference number	113512
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10000668

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation school
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	567
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andy Comerford
Principal	Andrew Finney
Telephone number	01769 572129
Website	www.smcc.devon.sch.uk/
Email address	management@smcc.devon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 June 2012

Information about this school

- South Molton Community College is smaller in size to most secondary schools. Around half the pupils travel to and from the school by bus. Since the previous inspection, the Principal has been appointed and a new Chair of the Governing Body has been elected.
- Since January 2013, the school has been a Co-operative Trust school. The school has also established a number of informal links with other schools and colleges in the region, including Bridgwater College, Okehampton College and The Woodroffe School.
- It is expected that the school will move into a new building, due to be constructed on the existing site, in early 2017.
- No pupils attend off-site alternative provision.
- The school met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of Key Stage 4.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection converted from a one-day short inspection. There was insufficient evidence to confirm the school's effectiveness by the end of the first day, so the inspection converted to a full inspection. Two more inspectors joined the inspection on the second day.
- Inspectors observed learning in a wide range of lessons and other activities. They talked to many pupils about their experiences of school. In their visits to lessons, inspectors also looked carefully at the quality of pupils' work and the accuracy of the school's assessment information. Many lessons were observed jointly with members of the school's leadership team.
- Discussions took place with the Principal and with other leaders and with various members of staff. An inspector also met with members of the governing body.
- Inspectors scrutinised records of the school's self-evaluation, the checks on teaching quality, assessment information and minutes of the meetings of the governing body. Safeguarding documentation and records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance were also examined.
- Inspectors looked at the 58 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. The views of staff were obtained and 40 responded to a written staff questionnaire. A sample of 30 questionnaires completed by pupils were also considered.

Inspection team

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