

The Axe Valley Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113497
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	338186
Inspection dates	7–8 July 2010
Reporting inspector	John Seal

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	878
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	124
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Godbeer
Headteacher	Martin Smith
Date of previous school inspection	22 May 2007
School address	Chard Street Axminster EX13 5EA
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 38 lessons which involved seeing 32 teachers. Meetings were held with students, staff and governors. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at: data on students' progress; a range of policies and planning documents; minutes of meetings; the school's self-evaluation documents; risk assessments; financial information; and the single central record of safeguarding checks on staff. The team analysed questionnaires which were returned by 139 parents and carers, 147 students and 56 staff.

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

- the reliability of the school's analysis of students' progress information to support evidence of improving attainment
- the effectiveness of teachers' use of assessment during lessons to challenge all ability groups
- the extent to which the systems leaders and managers use to hold teachers to account are comprehensive and robust.

Information about the school

Axe Valley is smaller than the average secondary school and has specialist status for business and enterprise. A very large proportion of students are of White British origin. The proportions of students known to be eligible for free school meals and who speak English as an additional language including those at an early stage of learning English are low. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. Their needs include specific learning, moderate learning and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

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

Axe Valley provides its students with a good quality of education and is continuing to improve. Direct inspection evidence and the school's own data indicates that:

- students' attainment is average overall with a continuing upward trend of improvement, but this is not yet reflected in the proportion of higher grades at the end of Year 11
- students' progress is good with some examples of accelerated learning towards the end of Key Stage 4
- students' behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school, reflecting their good all-round personal development
- attendance has improved since the last inspection and is above average
- the overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. The work of the recently appointed leadership team is beginning to have a positive impact on teaching and learning and the tracking of students' progress, but not yet consistently enough to have had a full impact on students' attainment
- the school's specialist status provides a strong contribution to improving the quality of teaching, the curriculum and partnerships for learning
- the governing body know the school well and, through regular monitoring and evaluation, challenge the school effectively and hold it to account
- a range of activities support the school's overall development of community cohesion, but its sound plans to provide a comprehensive programme to encourage students' understanding of different people from Britain and the rest of the world are yet to be fully implemented
- the clear and direct leadership of the headteacher and senior team have improved the school to a point where there is:
 - - a high proportion of good teaching and learning, although teachers do not use assessment consistently well to meet the needs of all ability groups in lessons, or to show students how to improve their work
 - - a responsive and well-planned curriculum
 - - effective care, guidance and support that promotes a feeling of being safe and well looked after in the students.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good because of the strong focus on improvement from the headteacher and leadership team, challenging and effective governors, and remarkably accurate and incisive self-evaluation at all levels. As a result, the senior leaders have already clearly identified priority areas in a detailed and effective school improvement plan.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of students attaining 5 A*–C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, by improving the consistency and precision of:
 - lesson planning, so that all ability groups are challenged to do well
 - teachers' feedback to students about their next steps in learning, particularly for the more-able students
- Improve the quality of provision in the sixth form by:
 - increasing the proportion of good teaching across all subjects
 - using data consistently well to track students' progress.
- Improve students' awareness, knowledge and understanding of the range and diversity of different faiths, religions and cultures both in Britain and globally.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Observations of lessons, students' work and the school's current data show that:

Students' attitudes to school and learning are positive and there are many examples of students enjoying their learning. Some examples of excellent behaviour were seen. However, in the small number of lessons which do not match their learning needs or capabilities, a few students sometimes have difficulty in concentrating or staying on task and become disinterested or boisterous

Students say that there is little bullying and racial incidents are very low. The majority of students have a good awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle. This is demonstrated by the high take-up of out-of-school sports activities. Positive, well-developed relationships between staff and students promote an atmosphere of tolerance and harmony. There are many good opportunities for students to access a range of cultural experiences in art, music and the humanities. However, their awareness of how people of different faiths, cultures and religions live in Britain and around the world is underdeveloped.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	2

How effective is the provision?

The key characteristics of good teaching are:

- a consistency in lesson planning across subjects and key stages
- clear learning objectives to help students understand what is expected of them
- teachers' good subject knowledge, used to good effect by probing students' thinking through skilful questioning
- well-organised resources and materials to provide students with practical experiences
- many examples of teachers providing students with feedback regarding how well they are doing and what they need to do next.

However, the precision in using assessment information to meet students' differing needs during lessons is inconsistent across the school. As a result, the most-able students are not always provided with activities and feedback to support their attainment of higher grades, and students who require more structured support sometimes struggle to keep up.

The curriculum has many strengths, including:

- a positive emphasis and impact on the improvement of literacy skills, particularly for boys
- responsiveness to students' choice and need, for example through open choices and developing BTEC courses at Key Stages 4 and 5
- the positive impact of the business and enterprise status on specialist subjects and in developing enterprise activities across the curriculum, such as the biodiesel project

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- work-related learning that motivates disaffected students and is well balanced to ensure their basic skills are effectively developed
- a strong enrichment programme providing trips, workshops and a good range of extra-curricular activities with high take-up rates

The school has identified that it needs to further improve partnership arrangements at Key Stages 4 and 5 to extend their range and quality.

The school's good care, guidance and support is evidenced by:

- vulnerable students being looked after very well by the well-managed support team
- strong links with parents and effective working partnerships with a wide range of professionals
- good transition arrangements with contributory primary schools and between key stages
- effective reintegration programmes for students who have been excluded
- good deployment of teaching assistants to support students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, although this aspect has not been evaluated to measure its full effectiveness across all departments

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Since his appointment two years ago, the headteacher has demonstrated clear vision and leadership by ensuring that there are secure and effective systems in place to drive up the quality of teaching and learning. As a result:

The school has good relationships with parents and carers. Some of the effective strategies in place include:

Robust and secure safeguarding procedures ensure that all staff are fully checked before they can work with students. Effective risk assessments are in place for both on-site and off-site activities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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 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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The new leadership and management team have a clear view of how the sixth form should improve, which is supported by a range of sound strategies. As a result, improvements are rapidly becoming apparent. For example:

- clear tracking systems are in place for identifying students' performance, although they are not yet used consistently well
- the quality of teaching and learning is thoroughly and accurately monitored and evaluated
- a wide and expanding range of Level 3 and BTEC courses are developing well through effective partnership links
- more students are staying on to complete their examination courses
- recent but secure indications reflect an increase in consistency and the proportion of good teaching, although this has yet to have impact on examination results, which are broadly average.

Other increasingly positive outcomes include the good behaviour and mature attitudes towards learning of students, who make a strong contribution to the school community by:

- supporting younger students in classes
- running information communication and technology courses for the local community
- leading the student forum.

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

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Views of parents and carers

The parents and carers who returned questionnaires were positive and supportive, although a few raised individual concerns about:

- the help they receive to support their child's learning
- their child making enough progress
- how the school deals with unacceptable behaviour
- the way in which the school takes account of parents' and carers' suggestions
- helping their child have a healthy lifestyle.

Inspectors found that links with parents to support were good, but some groups of students could be making more progress, particularly the most-able students. Inspectors found that there were appropriate systems in place to deal with any challenging behaviour and found strong evidence that students' behaviour was good. They found that the school takes good account of suggestions, and does a good job of promoting healthy lifestyles.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Axe Valley 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 139 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 878 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	50	36	83	60	5	4	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	55	40	82	59	2	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	42	30	88	63	8	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	43	31	77	55	15	11	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	36	26	94	68	5	4	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	27	78	56	22	16	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	19	95	68	11	8	4	3
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)	37	27	78	56	8	6	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	29	82	59	12	9	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	49	35	69	50	13	9	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	21	89	64	12	9	4	3
The school is led and managed effectively	34	24	88	63	9	6	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	48	35	76	55	12	9	1	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.



9 July 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Axe Valley Community College, Axminster EX13 5EA

When we inspected your school recently, we were impressed with your friendly welcome and good behaviour. Many of you completed questionnaires and some of you met with inspectors to talk about your school life.

Most of you told us that Axe Valley is a good school and we agree. There have been many improvements since the last time the school was inspected and these have included:

- more of you achieving better GCSE results
- your attendance improving to above average
- more good lessons
- better ways in which the school looks after you

The inspectors talked with your headteacher, staff and governors about what areas the school could improve. We agreed with the points in their good plans, which have already identified the following:

- helping more of you to achieve higher grades in your GCSE results, by ensuring that lessons fully challenge all ability groups to do well, and teachers always show you clearly how to improve your work
- increasing the amount of good lessons and improving the tracking of your progress in the sixth form to help more of you gain better examination results
- putting into action the plans to help you learn about the different backgrounds and beliefs of people who live further afield in this country and around the world.

The team hope that you continue to enjoy your time at Axe Valley and wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Seal

Her Majesty's Inspector

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