

Inspection of a good school: Sidmouth College

Primley Road, Sidmouth, Devon EX10 9LG

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 May 2022

Outcome

Sidmouth College continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils say the school has a strong 'community feel'. They feel they are well supported by their teachers. Pupils, staff and the community are proud of the school and about their achievements.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils. Behaviour in lessons is good and pupils focus on their learning well. There is a broad range of subjects for pupils to study at key stages 4 and 5. All pupils study religious education in key stage 4. This gives pupils a wider view of the world beyond their local experiences.

Pupils say they are listened to. They have opportunities to lead. Leaders respond to feedback. For example, they have introduced an A-level politics course as a result of requests from pupils.

Pupils feel safe at school. There are good relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils appreciate that staff help them with their concerns. Pupils are well informed about mental well-being and know how to look after themselves and seek help if needed. Pupils say bullying rarely happens. When it happens, it is dealt with promptly.

Following on from the restrictions caused by the pandemic, leaders are rebuilding a wide programme of enrichment. There are many opportunities, especially in sports and performing arts.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have a clear intent for the curriculum. This forms the bedrock for subjects. Leaders have worked closely with primary schools to understand what pupils have learned. They have used this knowledge to adapt their curriculum. Teachers review the curriculum regularly and plan to address the gaps in pupils' knowledge. Most subject leaders have identified the key knowledge and skills they want pupils to learn. However, in

some subjects this is still being developed so that teachers can understand the specific knowledge to teach to pupils.

The proportion of pupils entered for the range of qualifications that make up the English Baccalaureate has decreased. This is because languages have not had the same uptake as previously. Leaders understand this and have taken action to improve it.

The number of pupils joining the sixth form has increased. Students say they choose to study at the school because they feel supported, and teachers are 'always there' for them. The school offers a choice of A-level subjects and the curriculum has been carefully planned.

Reading is a priority for leaders. The library is central to their work to promote a love of reading. There is support for pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read that focuses on reading for pleasure and provides some phonics teaching. Literacy support is structured and prepares pupils for the content they are learning next. Leaders are ambitious to develop literacy support further, with a focus on improving pupils' vocabulary.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive effective support. Teachers are knowledgeable about pupils' individual needs and make adaptations as necessary. Leaders have looked at provision for pupils with SEND through every aspect of the school development plan. Teachers say they receive helpful training and are confident in supporting these pupils.

The personal, social and health education programme is extensive and delivered by subject specialists. Leaders have considered the needs of the pupils in planning the curriculum. For example, pupils learn about healthy relationships. Teachers are skilled at having sensitive conversations with pupils that support this aspect of their personal development.

There is also a well-established careers programme for all pupils. Pupils look at career pathways in each subject. Sixth-form students go on to attend a range of universities and destinations.

There is a wide range of enrichment activities to further promote pupils' personal development. Leaders track attendance but do not yet have enough data to understand which pupils are engaging with clubs and activities. Sixth-form students say they have many opportunities for wider development. This includes the long-held tradition of the annual 'Christmas tree carry' in the local town.

Everyone understands how leaders monitor pupils' behaviour and what the expectations are. Leaders are tenacious in their work to support pupils' behaviour. Attendance has reduced since the start of the pandemic. There are diligent plans in place to safeguard pupils who have elected to be home educated. Leaders are working on early help intervention to support pupils who are struggling to return to school full time.

Leaders listen carefully to all stakeholders. They respond to staff welfare surveys promptly. Teachers say that their training is well planned, and they receive the

development they need. Newer teachers say they are well supported, and the in-house training they receive is aligned with external providers. Governors are experienced and knowledgeable about the school. They ask leaders challenging questions and provide the right amount of support to leaders too.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding team is experienced and vigilant. Designated safeguarding leaders are well trained and very knowledgeable. Pupils and staff know how to report concerns and do so promptly. Leaders have established good relationships with others in the community to help keep pupils safe. For example, they actively work with local healthcare providers. As a result, pupils who need help are well supported and relationships with families are good. Leaders have focused on understanding and promoting mental well-being. The school has achieved the Carnegie Gold Mental Health Award.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders have not fully identified the key knowledge they want pupils to learn. Teachers know what is being taught and what the end goal is but are refining the specific knowledge to be taught. Leaders should continue with this work and be explicit with all stakeholders about the key knowledge that pupils will be assessed on.
- As a result of the pandemic, some pupils have not yet returned fully to the school. There are also pupils who are not able to maintain their attendance. This means that some pupils' attendance is not yet good enough. Leaders should continue to develop the planned early-help interventions to support pupils in their return to school.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	113503
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10200244
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	869
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	151
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair of governing body	Ann Denner
Principal	Sarah Parsons
Website	http://www.sidmouthcollege.devon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18 October 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The current principal was appointed to the school in September 2018.
- The school uses four providers of alternative education.
- Since the previous inspection, the number of pupils on roll has risen. The sixth form has also increased in size.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the principal and other senior leaders, teachers and pupils. The lead inspector also met with the chair of governors and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in English, modern foreign languages, religious education and art. In each subject, inspectors visited lessons, scrutinised pupils' books and held discussions with subject leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in key stages 3, 4 and 5. The lead inspector met with a group of sixth-form students.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including policies and records for behaviour management, attendance, safeguarding and pupil movement.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner from the local authority.
- Inspectors considered the 71 responses to Ofsted Parent View, including 67 free-text comments. Inspectors also viewed the 64 responses to the pupil survey and the 59 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Rachel Hesketh, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mark Burgess

Ofsted Inspector

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