

Stony Dean School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110579
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	288711
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	117
6th form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Lesley Wickham
Headteacher	Ms Pauline Dichler
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2002
School address	Orchard End Avenue Pineapple Road Amersham HP7 9JW
Telephone number	01494 762007
Fax number	01494 765631

Age group	11–19
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2007
Inspection number	288711

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Stony Dean is a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and for pupils with speech or communication difficulties, including autism. There are only three female pupils. There are a small number of lower attaining pupils in post 16 provision. The school is designated by the local authority as a resource for Language and Communication Enhancement (LACE). Most pupils are White British although a minority of pupils are from Asian, Black or Polish heritage. Almost a third of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, a high proportion, and there is a small minority of pupils for whom English is an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Stony Dean is a good school with some outstanding strengths. Pupils love coming to school and parents are happy for their children to attend, knowing they will be safe, that they enjoy their lessons and that the school has high expectations of their progress. Because of their learning difficulties, the standards reached by pupils are below national averages but all pupils do well in their studies and make outstanding progress in their personal development. One parent commented that her son's progress '...shows every day'. The school tracks pupils' progress very well. The teaching is good, particularly for pupils with autistic conditions. Lessons are well planned but the school is aware of the need for overall consistency in the way the pupils' achievement is recorded. The curriculum is traditional in nature and is effective in promoting the pupils' basic skills. The programmes offered, however, are not sufficiently adapted to match the increasingly complex needs of all the learners. There has been some adaptation of the programmes offered to reflect the changing pupil profile and plans exist to continue this process. The curriculum is significantly enriched by the excellent use of off site visits to extend the pupils' cultural understanding and by successful procedures to enable pupils to learn and mix socially with pupils at mainstream schools.

The pupils thrive within the supportive ethos of the school. Children who are underachieving because of behavioural or personal difficulties are quickly identified and supported through the school's exemplary procedures. The pupils value the school. This is evident through the excellent relationships they have with staff and their very good attendance. There is a strong emphasis placed on personal, health and social education, (PHSE) through which pupils learn to remain healthy, to keep safe and to behave well. The pupils are involved wherever possible in decisions about themselves. There is a flourishing school council and effective procedures are developing whereby pupils assess their own work and discuss their targets with pastoral teachers. Pupils in post 16 provision make good gains in their level of maturity and confidence helped by a very well organised programme of work related learning and work experience.

Progress is driven by a committed leadership team. The head teacher has been inspirational in her relatively short time at the school. She has maintained and improved morale after a difficult period and, supported by very able deputies, has significantly improved most aspects of provision. The school evaluates its work well. The governing body is supportive and is increasingly able to challenge the leadership and give effective strategic direction. The school is improving rapidly and has an outstanding capacity to maintain this improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development because of very good procedures to develop their experiences of adult life. The school has developed a successful work experience programme to which pupils respond enthusiastically. There are developing links with local colleges whereby pupils access vocational qualifications and which provide a supported transition to the next stage of their education. The pupils' work and progress is carefully monitored to help them reach their potential in nationally accredited courses. The leadership and management of the department are good. The post 16 department is developing rapidly and successfully, for instance in the recent expansion of provision to two years. However, teachers have developed some opportunities for pupils to follow individually based timetables.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen the way teachers record the small steps in pupils' progress.
- Ensure the curriculum is closely matched to the increasingly complex needs of the pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Standards are below average but achievement is good. Pupils make good progress, especially in basic skills, and most pupils gain nationally recognised qualifications in Year 11, including a small number of pupils who achieve GCSE success. Pupils' attainment on entry is below average but all pupils make at least good progress in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 11 and some make outstanding gains. Some pupils who go into post 16 provision have attainment that is particularly low. They nevertheless achieve outstandingly well because their work is carefully monitored and they are constantly challenged to make progress towards higher levels of certification. The specific targets set for pupils with communication disorders are well written and challenging. As a result these pupils make very good progress in their speech and language acquisition.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pupils make outstanding progress in personal development and this reflects the school's strong management of behaviour and the emphasis on moral and social values. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is exceptional while their excellent cultural development is supported by theatre and art gallery visits and through the several cultural school societies such as the French and Spanish clubs.

The school is calm because pupils feel safe and know what is expected from them. Pupils feel confident that no bullying takes place or would ever be tolerated by their teachers. The school's detailed records demonstrate clearly that behaviour has improved significantly over the last year. During the inspection, pupils were found to be polite and considerate of others. They gain a good understanding of sex and relationships and how to keep themselves safe and healthy through very good provision in PHSE. They develop very good social skills through the many communal activities at lunchtimes. The older pupils learn valuable work related skills through well organised work experience. Attendance is outstanding because the pupils love school so much. Those spoken to were happy to explain how much the school had helped them to develop their confidence and skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers know their pupils very well and this helps them to plan interesting, well paced lessons. There are good relationships between classroom teams, and the competent teaching assistants give very good support to pupils. The pupils like their

teachers and enjoy the lessons. Pupils in Year 7, in a mathematics lesson, had great fun trying to beat a computer-generated character at counting backwards and in multiples of ten. The pupils are given challenging work by the teachers but the recording of progress is not consistent. The teaching of pupils with autism and those with English as an additional language is well organised and this enables many of these pupils to make outstanding progress. For instance, in an imaginative role play, pupils with communication difficulties in Year 11 made very good progress when they engaged in questions and answers while acting as a shopkeeper in a pet shop. Teaching in post 16 is well planned to enable pupils to develop their independence and life skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and there is good progression and continuity which leads to the pupils gaining nationally accredited qualifications. The timetable has a traditionally subject based structure which incorporates some opportunities for work related learning in Years 10 and 11. The school has identified that this does not yet allow sufficient flexibility to adapt to the increasingly complex needs of the pupils. There are a range of suitable courses for post 16 pupils and particularly good provision for links with colleges and for work related learning. There is a wide range of activities to take pupils out of the classroom, teaching them to behave appropriately in the community and showing them that new things can be learned in a variety of situations. The curriculum is significantly enriched by the many cultural and sporting activities. The school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to experience life in mainstream schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides outstanding care for pupils. Child protection procedures are exemplary and there are secure procedures for risk assessment and health and safety. The necessary checks on staff are in place. Governors regularly monitor all aspects of care provision. Support for pupils with problems is excellent and this plays a significant role in the improvement of the pupils' behaviour. The school has developed very good procedures for involving pupils in the assessment of their own work and personal development. Pupils are well aware of their personal targets and strive for points for effort and behaviour each lesson. The pupils are also increasingly able to assess their work for themselves, and discuss their progress with their teachers. Parents are fully involved in annual target setting and report satisfaction with their level of involvement in their child's education. The transition arrangements when pupils leave the school are outstanding.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The head teacher has shown outstanding leadership since her relatively recent appointment. She has supported and encouraged other members of the senior team and, together, they are guiding substantial positive change. A strength of the school lies in the effective way senior managers monitor and evaluate each aspect of the school's performance. For instance the school is well aware of the inconsistencies in recording and has positive plans to remedy the situation. The effectiveness of subject leaders in monitoring standards is variable.

Communication within the school is excellent. Staff are fully consulted and all feel involved and valued. The quality of professional training for all staff is outstanding. This has a positive effect on pupils' achievement. Governors are supportive and have devised detailed action plans to monitor the school's performance. Relationships with parents are good because they are encouraged through the Annual Review procedure to become actively involved in their child's education. The school has remained stable through a period of significant change and there has been rapid improvement since the new leadership has been in place. The school has an outstanding capacity to improve further.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

24 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stony Dean School, Amersham, HP7 9JW

Not long ago I came to the school to see how you were getting on and whether I could suggest anything to make the school better. You made me very welcome and I enjoyed meeting some of you in the classroom. Thank you and well done also to the members of the school council who were very helpful.

I was with you for two days. That was long enough for me to realise that Stony Dean is a good school which is getting better all the time. One of the reasons is that you all enjoy school so much. There were lots of other things that I liked. Here are a few:

- you work hard and make good progress
- the many different people at the school do their best to look after you
- you are helped to be as independent as possible and to make as many choices for yourselves as you can
- you are learning to take some responsibility for your own progress.

There are two things which I think would make the school better:

- teachers should improve the way they write down which level you have reached in your learning; this would help you to learn even faster
- your teachers should make some changes to the lessons to help every one of you to make the best progress that you can.

Please thank your parents for the many helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

Best wishes and good luck,

Yours sincerely,

Melvyn Blackband

Lead Inspector