

Stony Dean School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110579
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	337525
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Grahamp Pirt

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	150
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Martin Pounce
Headteacher	Mrs Pauline Dichler
Date of previous school inspection	0 May 2007
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 18 lessons, an assembly and activities at break and lunchtimes. They saw the arrival and departure of students and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They scrutinised curriculum and safeguarding documentation and other policies. They also examined the responses from 35 questionnaires returned from parents and carers, 91 from students and 38 from staff.

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

- the outcomes of students within the Every Child Matters programme
- the quality of teaching and teaching support, including the use of assessment and target-setting to support learning
- the contribution made by curricular and extra-curricular opportunities including specialist school status to student outcomes
- arrangements for safeguarding.

Information about the school

Stony Dean is a special school for students with language, speech and communication difficulties, including autism and moderate learning difficulties. There are only four female students. The school has sixth form provision and gained specialist status for communication and interaction just over a year ago. Most students are of White British origin, although a third of students are from Asian, Black or other minority ethnic groups. Twenty percent of the students are entitled to free school meals, a percentage which has reduced over recent time since the last inspection but which is still slightly above average. There is a small number of students for whom English is an additional language.

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

Stony Dean is a good and inclusive school. There are a number of outstanding features including the care, guidance and support provided for students. The dedicated and inspirational work of the headteacher has developed good leadership and management at all levels, and is supported well by the governing body and the hard work of all staff. Parents and carers, together with the local authority, are very supportive of the school. Procedures to protect students are all in place and they report feeling very safe; a view supported by parents and carers. Behaviour is exemplary with one student commenting that, 'The school does very well for us so we all behave and that helps us learn.'

Since the last inspection Stony Dean has undergone a restructuring of the senior leadership team, providing a clear direction to the school, as well as changes to middle management that are ongoing. It has also successfully integrated a previous residential setting into an educational resource and gained specialist school status. The school has good resources for specialist teaching and these are used effectively.

Students make good progress in their learning. Although teaching is good overall, in some lessons assessment of students' learning is not always used in planning for students' individual needs. At times classroom assistants are not always advised enough as to how they can best support the teaching and learning. The good curriculum has been enhanced very well by the specialist school status and is further enriched through an excellent range of additional activities. However, students' skills in information and communication technology are not consistently well developed in all lessons and students are disappointed from studying a modern foreign language, though some could benefit from the opportunity. Older students gain external accreditation, some to the lower levels of GCSE and very occasionally to higher levels. Good opportunities are provided for them to work with other establishments to gain vocational and social skills that prepare them for moving on.

Social development is outstanding and the calm, well-organised working environment enables excellent relationships to develop between all. Staff understand the needs of the students very well and maintain very effective links with external agencies on their behalf. The school has been successful in dealing with a small number of persistent absentees but a small number of parents and carers do not always ensure their children attend regularly.

The headteacher and senior team are keen to build on the recent changes and develop the school further. The important improvements made so far, particularly in relation to meeting the key issue of meeting students' increasingly complex needs and improving the tracking of all student progress, together with outstanding elements in its provision,

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demonstrate that the school has good capacity to sustain further improvements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - linking all lesson planning to recent assessment information so that tasks are more closely matched to the needs of students
 - ensuring that classroom assistants are better directed by teachers so that all are used effectively during the whole of each lesson.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum by:
 - developing the more consistent use of information and communication technology skills in lessons
 - reviewing the decision to disapply a modern foreign language in the light of the entitlement of the current student population.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The progress made by students in relation to their age and prior attainment is good. This progress is demonstrated through the good range of external accreditation gained, their progress towards challenging targets and by the good, and sometimes better, work done in most lessons. Students usually work hard. They show enjoyment and most want to do well and succeed in lessons. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is outstanding; students are very clear about right and wrong and what is acceptable. They are able to come together successfully during assemblies where they consider issues of morality and undertake moments of reflection. Other successful gatherings are seen in clubs and at lunchtimes when the high standards of behaviour are maintained. Students feel very safe and know that positive behaviour management strategies contribute to this; they are understood and trusted by all. The calm atmosphere of the school fosters very good social relationships, helping students with communication difficulties to interact with others. Students are extremely aware of healthy lifestyles and choose healthy options in the dining hall or bring healthy packed lunches. They take part in, and enjoy, a great deal of physical activity each week through a wide range of curriculum activities and clubs. The vibrant 'Stony Dean Voice' ensures that the views of the students are heard in a meaningful and productive manner. Delegates are proud to be members of the council and try very hard to be fair in representing the views of their classmates. For example, they have been involved in the design of a new adventure trail. They contribute well to the wider community through help projects, fund-raising and other activities. Their skills are developing well in literacy and numeracy, enterprise projects and out-of-school experiences which help them prepare for their next stage of learning, although a few students are absent too often. Students' moral and social development is outstanding but cultural and spiritual development is more limited although still good. Art contributes well to aspects of cultural development through the art of Aboriginal, African and other cultures, as does religious education to spiritual

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development.

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	*
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	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Excellent relationships contribute to the sense of enjoyment and adventure in many lessons. In the best lessons teachers are very aware of students' abilities through accurate assessments and use these to plan challenging tasks so that progress can be quickly and efficiently shown and students provided with regular opportunities to reflect on how well they are doing and whether they are likely to meet the targets set. However, there remains some inconsistency, and learning targets are not always clear. As a result, in a few lessons work is not closely matched to students' needs. The school places much emphasis on providing stimulating learning environments for students with good-quality resources in classrooms. This has been enhanced by the specialist school status, ensuring that improvements have taken place since the last inspection and there

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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is now good access to computers and other information and communication technology facilities such as interactive whiteboards, although, on occasions, opportunities to incorporate these skills into lessons are missed. Classroom teams are usually well managed by teachers but, occasionally, skilled classroom assistants are not used to maximum effect throughout the whole lesson. The curriculum provides good content that is largely matched to the needs and interests of all students. The school chose, a while ago, to disapply students from studying a modern foreign language, although students do experience aspects of foreign culture and language. This results in some students, who may benefit from learning a language, not receiving their entitlement. Stony Dean successfully uses a good range of curriculum courses in Key Stage 4. Very good partnerships, enhanced by the specialist school status, exist with local schools, colleges and businesses. The specialist school status has enriched the communication provision for students, particularly those with learning needs on the autistic spectrum who are very well catered for. Their environment is very well managed to allow the specialised curriculum to operate well. Most subjects have a focus on the promotion of literacy and the development of communication and interaction. In most cases teachers plan well for these skills to be practised and developed in lessons. Huge attention is paid to keeping students safe, healthy and protected from risk, reflected in the care given to reorganising arrival and departure processes for students. Good staffing levels, clear policies and structures and the skills of the adults ensure that the behavioural needs of students are well supported. The strong and positive links with outside agencies support students' social, emotional, behavioural and other needs. For example, parents and carers are helped to ensure that students attend school regularly. This has been particularly successful with some persistent absentees.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Stony Dean is an improving school because of the dedicated and inspiring leadership of the headteacher. The senior team recognises the value of creating further opportunities for students to follow individual curriculum pathways both within the school and in partnership with other schools and agencies. Furthermore, the senior team is clear about how it intends to continue to improve the quality of teaching through using the school assessment information in all lessons. The proposed introduction of a new computer management system is aimed to develop this area. Further developments are

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in process to strengthen and develop middle management but are not yet completed. Senior managers provide clear direction and a sense of purpose to the school and are held to account by the knowledgeable and supportive governing body. They ensure that all staff understand the priorities for development and how each can help the school to improve further. All students have equal opportunities to succeed within a good curriculum range designed to match students' interests, abilities and needs. Stony Dean succeeds in maintaining good links with learners' homes. For example, regular information leaflets are sent home and meetings are arranged for parents and carers to attend. Reports and reviews are used as good opportunities to gather the views of parents and carers, but more remains to be done as a small number of parents feel they need more information about what their children are doing at school and how they can help in supporting their learning. All policies and procedures for protecting students are in place and are extremely thorough. Community cohesion strategies, audited and in planning, although not yet evaluated, are good when considered in the context of the work undertaken to engage students with the wider community. Community links are also embedded well in citizenship, as well as personal, social and health education courses. The school mainly deploys its resources very well but managers have not yet ensured that all support assistants are actively deployed.

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

Sixth form

Students in the sixth form make good progress in their lessons, leading to improved outcomes in terms of the number and level of accredited courses that are successfully

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completed. Since the last inspection the basic range of adult literacy and numeracy qualifications have been supplemented with a more diverse range of qualifications. These additional opportunities include business studies and horticulture, supporting the students well as they progress towards independence and the world of work, improving their team-working and self-sufficiency. As a result, an increasing number of students leave to continue their education with mainstream providers. Others continue their education in further specialist provision and in the previous two years all went on to education, employment or training. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding. The curriculum has improved and continues to develop. An outstanding aspect was observed in the enterprise activities, with students running a 'tea shop' for staff and taking responsibility for all the associated tasks and activities. There are usually good opportunities for students to incorporate the use of information and communication technology into their work and teachers generally use these effectively, although occasionally more-able pupils are not challenged adequately. Teachers generally provide well for students of all abilities to develop their literacy skills. All students are known well as individuals and staff respond to their communication and interaction needs supportively. A high level of care is shown both on a day-to-day basis and in the long-term support given as students progress towards independence. Guidance on next steps in education is clearly very effective due to the destinations of leavers. Actions taken at senior and middle leader level ensure that the academic and social progress of students is monitored well and has contributed to the improved outcomes for students in recent years. Leaders and managers have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form provision and are committed to further development.

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	2

Views of parents and carers

Thirty-four questionnaires were returned by parents and carers relating to 35 students in the school. From the data, all parents and carers agreed or strongly agreed with five of the statements (my child enjoys school, the school keeps my child safe, the school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle, the school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour, and the school is led and managed effectively). Inspectors agreed with these responses. More than half of these responses were strongly agree. The other responses were all over 90% positive, except for two statements (my child is making enough progress at this school, and the school helps me to support my child's learning) which

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are both at 88%, and the latter is frequently flagged as a concern in the comments made by parents on the form. Inspectors feel that this last area could be developed further but that students are making good progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Stony Dean 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 34 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 150 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	22	65	12	35	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	23	68	11	32	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	13	38	19	56	2	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	47	14	41	3	9	0	3
The teaching is good at this school	20	59	12	35	0	0	0	6
The school helps me to support my child's learning	15	44	15	44	4	12	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	56	15	44	0	0	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)	17	50	14	41	1	3	0	6
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	59	12	35	1	3	0	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	50	17	50	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	41	19	56	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	22	65	12	35	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	21	62	11	32	0	0	0	6

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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



10 December 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Stony Dean School, Amersham, HP7 9JW

Thank you for making me and the other inspectors so welcome when we visited Stony Dean recently. We very much enjoyed meeting you in lessons, in the dining room, during assembly and around the school. You are some of the most polite and well-behaved students that we have met in schools! These are some of the things that we found out during the inspection from watching your lessons, talking with many people, including yourselves, and reading comments from the questionnaires.

- Most of you enjoy going to school and appreciate the support of the staff.
- You make good progress at Stony Dean.
- You get on very well together and your behaviour is outstanding.
- The school provides good opportunities for you to learn and gain qualifications.
- Most of your teachers work hard to plan exciting and interesting lessons.
- All of the adults look after you very well indeed.
- The headteacher and other senior managers do a good job.
- Stony Dean is an improving school.

I have asked your teachers to improve how they plan lessons, taking notice of what you did before, and to get teachers to plan how to use classroom assistants to work even more effectively to support you all. I also asked them to look at improving some of the work in information and communication technology and looking to see if some of you could learn a modern foreign language. This will help everyone to see how well you are doing and what you are capable of.

With best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Graham Pirt

Lead Inspector

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