

# SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

*Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust*

Date of this document: 01 September 2009

## INSPECTION REPORT

### INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002

Name of school:	Tamar Valley School
DCSF number:	879/6010
FOCUS number:	605
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mr Mike Thirkell  Supporting Inspectors: Mr Simon Bennett Mrs Cecile Corfield  Lay Inspector: Mr Douglas Siderfin
Dates of inspection:	28 September – 1 October 2009

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## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Tamar Valley School

Address of the school: Foulston Avenue  
St Budeaux  
Plymouth  
PL5 1HL

Telephone number: 01752 363290

Fax number: 01752 366373

Proprietor: Oakdene Education Trust

Name of Chief Executive Officer: Mr Murray Liesching

Name of Senior Teacher: Mr Chris Knight

DCSF number: 879/6010

FOCUS number: 605

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

Age range of pupils and students: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 37 Girls: 20  
(Part time) Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 9 Girls: 3

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:  
Boys: 0 Girls: 1

Annual fees: N/A

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Mr Mike Thirkell  
Supporting Inspector: Mr Simon Bennett  
Mrs Cecile Corfield  
Lay Inspector: Mr Doulas Siderfin

Dates of inspection: 28 September – 1 October 2009

## **PART A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

### **Purpose and scope of the inspection:**

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A)(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Focus Learning Trust (FLT) and agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the Focus Learning Trust. His findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

### **Information about the school:**

Tamar Valley School, situated in St Budeaux, in Plymouth in Devon, opened on its current site in September 2008. It is owned and run by the Tamar Education Trust and run by the Oakdene Education Trust, which is affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust, and registered with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) as a school of Special Religious Character. The school was established following the amalgamation of the secondary provision at Focus Learning schools at Moor View and Treverbyn, both of which continue as primary feeder schools for Tamar Valley. The school provides education for children from the areas of Plymouth, St Austell, Torbay and Exeter. It currently provides places for 57 boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 18. One pupil has a statement of special educational need. The buildings were originally built as a maintained primary school, and together with the adjoining land have been extensively refurbished and modified to meet the needs of their current use as a secondary school.

The school expresses its aims as providing *'a full and balanced curriculum, based on the National Curriculum, providing a high quality of education within a Christian ethos and within a Christian-based, safe and disciplined environment'* with the goal *'of producing mature, well-balanced, self-disciplined students who will become caring, upright, responsible and trustworthy citizens'*.

### **Summary of main findings:**

The school has made rapid progress during its first year. It is successful in meeting its aims and provides a good quality of education. It has quickly developed a positive Christian ethos through the clear leadership and vision provided by its senior management with the support of its Trustees and the hard work of staff, and by building on the perceived strengths of the previous schools. Pupils unanimously say that they are pleased to be at the school and parents similarly indicate that they are generally very satisfied with the school's provision. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are effective. Pupils are well cared for and most acknowledge the support that they receive from school staff for their personal and academic development. Pupils of all ages and abilities make good progress. This is confirmed by their achievements in public examinations at the end of Year 11 which are above those for maintained schools nationally. Strategies for monitoring pupils' progress

are well considered and thorough. The school meets all the DCSF regulations relating to independent schools.

**What the school does well:**

- the generally high quality of teaching is well supported by the good quality of assessment;
- the curriculum is designed to meet the individual needs of pupils of all ages and abilities effectively; it serves the needs of pupils who have learning difficulties very well; and
- provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is outstanding and is reflected in the good relationships within the school at all levels.

**What the school must do to comply with the regulations:**

- the school meets all the requirements for independent schools and fully meets its responsibility with respect to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

**Next Steps:**

- develop the library as a stronger resource for independent learning;
- raise the quality of marking in all subjects to the level of the best practice; and
- review the co-ordination and organisation of virtual classroom (VC) lessons in the sixth form.

## **PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

### **The quality of education provided by the school**

#### **The quality of the curriculum**

The quality of the curriculum is good. It supports the school in fulfilling its Christian aims and ethos. It is planned carefully to meet the needs of all pupils, including those identified as having special learning needs and those who are academically gifted, to provide them with suitable opportunities to make progress. The school emphasises its aim of providing courses that are tailored to meet pupils' individual needs. Strategies for identifying each pupil's needs are thorough and are reflected in the good provision both in classes and, as necessary, individually. The curriculum is guided by a suitably wide range of policies, schemes of work and documentation, including that provided by Focus Learning. Additional materials produced by the school are carefully tailored to meet the specific needs of pupils as well as to meet the expectations of Focus Learning. Although all pupils attend the school on a full-time basis, the policy of responding wherever feasible to individual needs is reflected by provision for the two Year 13 sixth form pupils, one spending one day a week of his timetable out of school on an 'office-based' course, the other spending three days a week in a warehouse environment, working towards a warehousing and logistics qualification. Pupils' skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy are well served by the quality of their learning experience in English and mathematics, and throughout the curriculum. Pupils receive regular reading support when a need is identified as they enter the school in Year 7.

Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 have opportunities for a full range of learning experiences through access to all the subjects of the National Curriculum. A course in Bible Studies is taken by pupils throughout the school. The curriculum is enhanced through practical work in woodwork and textiles in both key stages, cookery in Key Stage 5 and business studies in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. The school emphasises the importance of music to the development of children. Despite recent difficulties in finding specialist staff for music, it is currently made available in Key Stage 3. Half of the pupils on roll, including those in Key Stage 4, take the opportunity of developing their musical skills through the peripatetic provision for learning to play the piano, guitar or flute. Appropriate opportunities are provided for information and communication technology (ICT) in the school timetable in most respects. The adoption of the GCSE graphics course in Key Stage 5 is welcomed and enjoyed by pupils, but planning to support pupils' work and developing skills is not sufficiently supported by existing computer software. Responses from a few pupils during the inspection indicate that not all have access to computers for homework. Most pupils enjoy physical education (PE) and games and the school is conscious of the need to support this aspect of the curriculum through a range of sports and other physical activities. The school gym and other facilities in the grounds are supplemented by use of excellent local sports facilities, which boys returning from soccer and girls from hockey said that they appreciated.

The sixth form provision is characterised by 'pathways' designed to meet the needs, abilities and aptitudes of older pupils. Despite the small size of the sixth form, the range of subjects available is good and pupils say that they are content with the subjects that they study. In Year 12 more able students currently take AS courses in English, mathematics, business studies and citizenship, and develop an extended project which provides them with access to the Assessment and Qualifications

Alliance (AQA) Baccalaureate qualification. All other Year 12 pupils take at least one subject to AS level and an extended project, as well as an appropriate range of courses, including business French, art, book keeping and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) course. The two pupils in Year 13 have suitable courses designed to meet their individual needs, although the use of the VC occasionally presents difficulties, such as the coordination of the timetables in the linked schools. The courses taken by Year 13 pupils when out of school reflect their specific interests: computer aided design and warehouse logistics and distribution respectively. Good opportunities for links with a local college of further education have been used to support the sixth form provision. The school keeps the curriculum provision under ongoing review and is actively considering how aspects can be developed to further meet the academic aptitudes of older girls.

The programme for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) is good and meets requirements. The school aims to ensure that the provision meets the specific needs of pupils at each key stage. In Key Stage 3 PSHE is provided through a regular weekly lesson and in Key Stage 4 through a specific block of time during each term of the academic year. The school is in the process of further developing PSHE courses in the upper school. It intends to provide PSHE for the sixth form on a similar model to that in Key Stage 4. Pupils' personal development and their generally good preparation for their working life are very well supported by a carefully planned programme of careers education. Work experience for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is well supported by Trustees. The opportunities provided are appreciated by pupils. The activities ensure positive preparation and de-briefing in relation to this important experience for pupils in Key Stage 4. The local careers service provides specific support for the pupil with a statement of special educational needs.

The curriculum is enhanced by a suitable range of visits and trips, although extra-curricular activities are constrained after school by the travel needs of pupils. Some parents and pupils indicate that they would like more opportunities to be provided. Overall, the quality of pupils' experience at school prepares them well for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

The majority of teaching is good, with a significant proportion containing outstanding features. No lessons observed were unsatisfactory. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and show enthusiasm and commitment. As a result, pupils make at least good progress throughout the school. In almost all lessons, carefully detailed planning, which takes into account the range of ability in the group, is a strength of the teaching. In the best lessons seen, the pace is brisk and teachers use effective questioning to assess the pupils' understanding and to ensure that all pupils in the class are drawn into learning. Challenging extension tasks are provided for the more able pupils and effective guidance is given to those pupils who need extra support. Within the small classes, pupils receive a significant amount of individual support. Outstanding teaching was observed in subjects across the curriculum. Interesting and relevant activities are seen in all subjects. In mathematics pupils completed an excellent project on the 'Tamar Valley Farm' and in a history lesson on 'bias' effective links were made with pupils' moral education. In an excellent English lesson on appreciation and understanding of text and subtext, a clear knowledge of the text and an understanding of the needs of the pupils

provided strong support for their development. Although a range of teaching strategies were used effectively in lessons, in some, limited opportunities were provided to enable pupils to experience working in pairs or small groups to share ideas and discuss processes.

Lessons demonstrated and built on the established positive relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils and staff treat each other with mutual respect. The teachers in general show that they value what pupils have to say. Teachers manage lessons well and, as a result, pupils demonstrate excellent behaviour and positive responses. They encourage pupils to listen to and respect the views of others. Consequently, a calm learning environment enables teachers to conduct their lessons without disruption. Resources to support learning are adequate, but do not always fully support teaching, for example, in science, where some apparatus is in need of replacement.

Senior managers observe lessons and provide carefully considered written and oral feedback to teachers and teaching assistants in order to improve their practice. Established systems of communication, supported by the small size of the school, ensure that teachers receive appropriate information about the prior attainment of the pupils in their class. Pupils with learning difficulties or with particular talents are identified in lesson plans and are given very good support from class teachers and the well-informed special needs co-ordinator. Individual education plans for those pupils on the special educational needs register provide clear details which inform teachers of the specific needs of pupils to be addressed in lessons. This enables these pupils to make at least good progress over time. The school has concentrated recently on improving the teachers' knowledge of national standards in relation to levels of attainment in all subjects. This training is ongoing as teachers become more proficient at assessing the standard of pupils' work and, consequently, raise the levels of expectation for all pupils.

The quality of assessment is good. The systems and framework to support effective assessments that have been put in place are well understood by the management team. The assessment strategies set out in policies and documentation are well placed to support pupils' progress, which is evaluated by reference to national norms as well as the school's own aims. Records and data that enable each pupil's progress to be tracked are already established in Year 7 and are firmly in the process of development throughout the rest of the school. This already enables the school to make predictions for pupils' academic performance. Records and data build on information provided by previous schools; these include the results of national tests and data derived from the initial testing of pupils when they join the school. Evidence points to these procedures being very thorough. Importantly the school uses pupil-friendly (flight path) systems to inform each pupil of their progress in each subject and to guide further improvement. These good procedures and systems are enhanced by the small size of the school, the positive relationships and teachers' generally good understanding of pupils' needs.

Information derived from assessment in each subject is used effectively by most teachers to plan learning and to ensure that all pupils' individual needs are reviewed and met within lessons, including those with special learning needs and those who are academically more able. Marking is undertaken regularly in the majority of subjects. Feedback provided to pupils in their exercise books is good overall, and is sometimes outstanding. However, occasionally it does not reflect the expectations for marking set out by the school and by Focus Learning Trust as appropriately good

practice. Most teachers understand the need to ensure that their written comments to pupils are clear and encouraging. Credits to encourage further improvement are generally used well and are valued by pupils. Occasionally feedback is insufficiently constructive and fails to support progress by saying what is good about a piece of work or how it can be improved. Written feedback comments in exercise books do not always reflect an awareness of the need for legibility or precision in relation to the age of the pupil for whom it is intended.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school's lively and positive environment provides a strong support to the high quality in pupils' development in this respect. The wide range of learning opportunities and experiences available to pupils are firmly in keeping with the ethos of the Focus Learning Trust, the Brethren and their schools. They provide excellent support for the development of pupils' growing self-esteem and self-confidence as they move through the school. Their growing spirituality is reflected in the prevailing moral and social climate within the school, and in pupils' positive behaviour and excellent conduct both in and out of class. It is supported throughout the curriculum through subjects such as Bible Studies, citizenship and history.

Tutorial and assembly groups encourage reflection and help the pupils' development through, for example, the opportunity to reflect on moral principles through 'a thought for the week'. Overall, the mutual respect seen between pupils, and between pupils and staff, provides a positive support for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which is further supported by the example set by senior management, teachers and Trustees. The high expectations set for behaviour, moral and social conduct, supported by aspects of PSHE and citizenship, are successful in developing pupils' understanding of right and wrong. This is further supported by links that have been made with local police, who have visited the school, and particularly with the community police officer for St Budeaux. Such contacts, combined with school visits and the citizenship course, provide pupils with a good developing understanding of public institutions. The school has firm plans to develop further links already established with local schools and colleges as appropriate.

The house and tutor systems reinforce an emphasis on consideration towards others, and pupils, in particular senior pupils and school prefects, are provided with good opportunities to show their initiative. The development of the school council provides further opportunities for pupils to take responsibility within and across the year groups. Pupils show their concern for others through raising money for national charities. The school is active in promoting awareness of the wider world, for example through visits to museums, art galleries and businesses, and through work experience for Years 10 and 11, active analysis and comparison of business activities, and increased environmental concern.

The curriculum provides pupils with a range of opportunities to develop an awareness of, as well as harmony with, other cultures and to develop tolerant attitudes. World cultures are studied in the creative aspects of the curriculum, for example aboriginal art, and pupils are made aware of the contribution of other



cultures through to the modern world through work and displays on the theme of mathematics and patterns derived from the Islamic world. The school is currently participating in a presentation of the role of the United Nations at another Focus school. Overall, this aspect of the provision is outstanding and continues to be strengthened. Pupils have a growing awareness of the world around them, and of their responsibilities within it. The provision of visits within the curriculum is good and is supported by the expectation that each pupil will experience at least two educational visits each school year.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**The welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The school is committed to the welfare and safeguarding of its pupils throughout the school. Most pupils say that they value the care they receive at school. The school is very alert to their safety and protection. All the required policies and procedures for health and safety and child protection are in place and implemented effectively. Pupils of all ages are clear that they are aware of whom to turn to if they have any personal problems. Any bullying, albeit rare, is dealt with and recorded by staff immediately and the pupils are secure in this knowledge. Pupils are closely supervised throughout the day, in and out of school.

Responses from pupils indicate that they feel safe in school and enjoy their time there. PSHE plays important role in the management of pupils' conduct, resulting in excellent behaviour and positive attitudes throughout the school. Pupils respond well to the house system and credit rewards for good work and progress. The behaviour policy specifies the range of rewards for good work and effort and sanctions are detailed for unacceptable behaviour, with any formal warnings issued recorded. Healthy living and eating are carefully promoted and the school strives to ensure that all pupils have healthy snacks and nutritious packed lunches. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in physical activities.

The school and its Trustees are diligent with regard to fire safety. Fire drills are held regularly and appropriate records are maintained. All fire equipment, including alarms, is checked conscientiously. The school has had a fire risk assessment undertaken by a commercial company. Whilst fully meeting requirements, the school has not always responded quickly enough to issues highlighted through ongoing safety checks. Current arrangements for First Aid are good. Three fully-trained First Aiders are in the school at all times and facilities are excellent for pupils who become ill. The school is aware of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and has an appropriate policy and statement of how the provision can be improved over the next three years.

Maintenance of an admission register and attendance registers demonstrate an understanding of the regulations. The documents kept by the school contain all the required information.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **Suitability of the proprietor and staff**

The school maintains a single central register which provides details of all of the required checks on staff, Trustees and volunteers, further ensuring the safeguarding of pupils.

#### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **Suitability of the premises and accommodation**

The school provides good premises and accommodation which are suitable for the safe and effective teaching of the age range of pupils. Specific Trustees are appropriately identified as having responsibility for maintaining the good condition of the buildings and site. The school is kept in excellent repair and daily cleaning ensures that classrooms and the wide corridors are maintained in a bright and attractive condition. The school has responded quickly to recent parental requests relating to keeping grass areas more regularly mown and the grounds tidy. The grounds are self-contained, so that systems for entry to the grounds and for keeping pupils and vehicles separate have been very carefully considered and constructed.

Rooms throughout the school generally provide good environments for learning. All classrooms, including the ICT suite, are spacious, well organised and enhanced by good displays, containing examples both of pupils' work and support for their learning. The school accommodation is further enhanced by a gym which also serves as a space for assemblies. Specialist rooms are available for woodwork and textiles. The library is small and has a relatively limited provision. Currently it is not a space capable of use as a resource for developing pupils' independent learning and research skills. Provision of resources is sound in most other respects.

The school is developing environmental awareness in its community. Various initiatives, such as the development of allotments, consideration of issues relating to sustainability, and recycling, have either been started or are being actively considered. Provision for access and emergency exits is excellent, and there is extensive use of ramps, a lift and other means to ensure the free movement of all pupils, including those who may have physical disabilities, into and round the school. The school is aware of the need to be rigorous in its training of staff for classroom health and safety. It is, for example, evaluating further the storage facilities in the woodwork classroom.

#### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **The quality of information for parents**

The quality of information provided and made available to parents is good. The school is clear about those aspects of information that have to be made available as a matter of course to all parents and prospective parents and those that have to be

made available on request from the school. All the required information is available through the school prospectus and pupils' handbook, or is listed as available from the school in the prospectus. Details of policies, including those in relation to discipline, admissions and complaints, are included in full in the prospectus. Examination results for the whole school are sent directly to parents each academic year when they are received.

Regular communications with parents occur through a variety of means. Reports on pupils' progress are provided each term, which is well above the minimum requirement for independent schools. Annual reports to parents on subjects are of good quality on the whole, although some are less specific than they might be about what a pupil has achieved and what they must do to improve further. They helpfully set out the progress made by pupils in a clear manner through use of National Curriculum levels as well as by reference to pupils' effort and attainment. Regular consultations are provided for parents throughout the academic year. The school's half-termly newsletter, 'Step Ahead', provides a good and very readable means of communication with the parents. Although a minority of parents think that communication could be improved, inspectors considered the provision to be very suitable. Nevertheless, the school is actively seeking ways of improving communications with parents. The school understands and complies with requirements to report to the local authority with respect to pupils with statements of special educational need.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure**

The school's complaints policy meets all of the requirements and is written in accessible language.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## **PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT**

*This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.*

### **The quality of the organisation and management of the school**

Tamar Valley School opened in September 2008 having evolved from the amalgamation of Moor View School at Newton Abbot and Treverbyn School at St. Austell, by acquiring new premises in a former primary school on the present site.

The new school has gained from earlier experiences at the previous schools and, along with the sympathetic support and positive response of past staff and the preparedness of new teaching staff to subscribe to its aims, has been able to ensure a smooth transition. There is now a strong, well-led team of professional staff in place, who show an understanding of the required ethos to take the school forward on an ordered, controlled course in line with its Christian aims. The CEO and the senior teacher has established a strong and productive working relationship which gives confidence to parents, teachers and pupils alike.

Budgeting and expenditure in each department are methodically planned, implemented and overseen.

#### ***Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?***

The waiting time for some decisions at trust level has sometimes emerged as an area of frustration.

**This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust. Further copies of the report are available from the Operations Manager of the Focus Learning Trust, Siskin House, Siskin Drive, Coventry, or from the School Inspection Service website: [www.schoolinspectionservice.co.uk](http://www.schoolinspectionservice.co.uk)**