

Mildenhall College of Technology

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124809
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	359778
Inspection dates	30 September 2010–1 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Thompson

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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	970
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Gray
Headteacher	Ms Susan Byles
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Thirty-six lessons were observed in the lower school and sixth form. One teacher was observed twice. Meetings were held with staff, pupils and governors. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at some policy documents and school reports. They scrutinised 118 parental, 159 pupil and 71 staff questionnaires.

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

- improvement in the quality of teaching and assessment since the last inspection
- improvement in behaviour and attendance since the last inspection
- improvement in communication with parents and willingness to take action on their views
- impact of partnership arrangements on provision and achievement

Information about the school

The college is situated in a semi-rural area 13 miles north-west of Bury St Edmunds, an area where the reorganization of schools and colleges is being planned and implemented. Most students come from white British backgrounds and enter the college at the beginning of Year 9. The proportion of them who are eligible for free school meals is smaller than average. The number of students with special educational needs is growing. A small minority of them have statements of special educational needs and speak English as an additional language. The headteacher and two of the senior leadership team were appointed in 2009. The college has difficulty in recruiting teachers in some key subject areas.

The college has created the single Forest Heath Sixth Form in partnership with the Newmarket College. It has been awarded specialist status for technology, science and applied learning. The college holds the Healthy Schools Award.

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

Mildenhall College of Technology is a good school. The headteacher was appointed at a time when the performance of the college was at a low ebb. Attainment and the progress were lower than they had been for some time, particularly in English and mathematics, and attendance and behaviour continued to cause concern. There were a number of teacher shortages in key subject areas. Much has changed and improved since that time. As a result of the recruitment of good teachers, carefully directed staff training and imaginative improvements to the curriculum, attainment is now above average and progress is good. Whilst attainments in English and mathematics have also improved they are now average. The number of incidents of misbehaviour have been dramatically reduced and attendance improved. The attainment and progress in the sixth form remain satisfactory.

Teaching is satisfactory both in the main school and the sixth form. Teachers pay particular attention to the needs of individual students and devote a good deal of their time helping them outside normal lessons. Students are guided to courses with learning styles that suit their aptitudes well. They are also given considerable help to improve their coursework and prepare for external assessments. The combination of satisfactory everyday teaching, courses with learning styles that are appropriate to students' needs, and extra help outside lessons enables pupils to succeed and make good progress. Nevertheless, this masks the fact that in too many lessons the expectations, pace and excitement are missing. Students find these lessons boring and have the tendency to go off task and engage in minor misbehaviour. The college needs to do more to raise the quality of teaching and learning in lessons to a more consistent good level.

The leadership and management of the college are good. Senior leaders are working hard to bring about improvements and all are working harmoniously to achieve change. Governors hold the senior staff to account and are influential in developing strategies and setting priorities. The college has worked successfully with feeder middle schools and Newmarket College to bring about much improvement to the curriculum. However, the leadership and management of teaching and learning is only satisfactory in both the main school and the sixth form. Whilst students' performance is monitored and recorded very well, not enough use is made of the data available to take early action to improve success rates and retention rates in the sixth form.

Students value their college community and are willing to take on responsibilities in the college and elsewhere well. They express their views on the development of the college and the curriculum effectively in year and college councils. Students are helping outside the college to develop respect and tolerance in the local community and by undertaking voluntary work in care homes, nurseries and primary schools. Students develop a good

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understanding of other cultures by linking with students in other countries and undertaking voluntary work on community projects in developing countries.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- improve the leadership and management of teaching and learning, including that in the sixth form, by using data more rigorously to identify ways to raise retention and success rates
- improve the quality of teaching and learning to a more consistent good level

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

When students arrive in Year 9 their attainments are broadly average and remain so at the end of that year, indicating that progress in Year 9 is satisfactory. By the end of Year 11 their attainment has risen to above average, showing that the overall progress students make whilst in the college is good. The results of the GCSE and other examinations show that attainment has been rising steadily over the past two years. In English and mathematics attainment has improved and is now broadly average. In many lessons students enjoy learning and endeavour to produce their best work. As a result of good care and support, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make good and sometimes outstanding progress.

Safety in the college is good. Students say they feel safe and generally understand what constitutes an unsafe situation. For example, they and staff have been training to identify and report anyone in the school who is not wearing an officially sanctioned identity badge.

Behaviour in and around the college has improved considerably over the past two years and is now good. Students are generally polite and considerate to each other and their teachers. Nevertheless, in the minority of lessons where the quality of teaching is not good, minor misbehaviour and lack of concentration do occur. Behaviour in sixth form lessons is always good and often outstanding. There are very few incidents of bullying or racism in the college, on the rare occasions when they occur they are dealt with quickly and effectively by the staff.

Students apply their well-developed basic skills in technology and science effectively to a wide range of situations and are well equipped with other skills and personal qualities to succeed in their future studies and the world of work. Many students go on to study at universities. They develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness well and most students lead healthy lifestyles. They have a good understanding of the next steps they need to take. Attendance has improved over the past two years and is now satisfactory.

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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	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good or better in over half of the lessons and unsatisfactory in a small minority of lessons. All teachers have good relationships with their students, plan lessons well and have satisfactory and sometimes good knowledge of their subject. The use of information and communication technology to enhance the impact of lessons is satisfactory and improving. When teaching is at its best, pace and expectations are high and teachers use their knowledge of the subject to inspire students to learn. Effective questioning is used to gauge students' understanding and teachers reinforce explanations when necessary. The best teachers use a good range of teaching styles. As a result, students show considerable interest, enjoy learning and make good progress. However, teaching is all too often less effective, expectations are not sufficiently high, pace is slow and lessons generally uninteresting. In these lessons the dialogue between teachers and their students lacks inspiration and is often of little value. As a result, students learn mechanically and some become bored, go off task and engage in minor misbehaviour. Students with special educational needs receive targeted support to enable them to progress well and sometime very well. Teaching assistants are satisfactorily effective and their contributions thoughtfully planned.

The curriculum is good and imaginative. In Year 9 a new curriculum has very recently been introduced based on an appropriate extension of the national strategies in the core subjects and cross-curricular themes. This has been devised in partnership with the feeder

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middle schools. It is too early to gauge the effectiveness of these changes. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is broad, comprehensive and imaginative. Students are guided and encouraged to follow routes to suit their particular needs. The curriculum includes applied GCSE and vocational courses. Level 1 courses for the less able students and a Construction and the Built Environment Diploma are available at the Newmarket College. The curriculum gives high levels of personal choice to enable students to progress in subjects and by means of course styles that are most suited to their needs, interests, aspirations and abilities. A good range of enrichment activities are provided and well attended, particularly during the lunch break. The curriculum makes a significant contribution to students' attainment and progress.

Mildenhall is a caring college and places the good guidance and support it gives to its students at the centre of its work. The college aims to enable all students to make the best of the opportunities it provides. When students join the college they settle in well as a result of good transfer arrangements. Students are known as individuals and treated according to their different needs well. There is extensive use of learning mentors to support vulnerable and underachieving students. The college has effective pastoral arrangements and works very effectively to support those with special personal and educational needs, sometimes in close partnership with outside agencies. These arrangements have resulted in significant improvement in attitudes, behaviour and achievement. The value of the care, guidance and support provided by the college is acknowledged by nearly all parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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?

The college has a clear and good vision for its continued development and senior leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the staff. All managers are fully committed to achieving this vision and have developed effective ways to make it a reality over a period of three years. The priorities to improve the quality of teaching and learning, the ethos of the school, behaviour, attendance, and develop partnerships with other local providers are highly appropriate. Challenging targets have been set and progress is monitored rigorously. As a result, test and examination results are rising steadily.

Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of the college well and have effective and rigorous ways to monitor performance. They have effective links with the staff, parents and students and frequently visit the college. Governors ensure the health, safety and well-being of staff and students well. Safeguarding procedures are good and all

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statutory requirements are met. The college deploys resources well and provides value for money.

The senior staff have developed highly effective ways to inform parents and carers about their children's progress, well-being and development. The introduction of a parents' forum, chaired by a governor, newsletter and new website has led to highly positive relationships with most groups of parents. Reports on students' progress and attainment have been improved and issued more frequently. The college promotes community cohesion effectively. The headteacher has been active and successful in reassuring worried parents in local areas where middle schools are likely to be closed of the benefits of attending the college.

The college has active and productive partnerships with local middle schools and the neighbouring Newmarket College. Discussions on national strategies in core subjects with the feeder middle schools have led to the introduction of an improved curriculum in Year 9. In partnership with Newmarket College many new applied and vocational courses have been introduced in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. A growing and significant number of pupils are taking these courses in the partnership college. Highly effective bussing arrangements have been introduced to facilitate the movement of students.

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	3
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form is satisfactory and improving. The prior attainment of students entering the sixth form is below average and most achieve grades in the examinations that are broadly in line with expectations. An above average proportion of students entered for the examinations obtain an award but the proportion achieving the higher grades is significantly below average. In 2010, attainment was below average. The progress made by students has been rising over the past three years and was satisfactory in 2009.

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Teaching is satisfactory but there are good and some times outstanding examples of teaching. There is an excellent relationship between teachers and students. Students have good planning and organisational skills and are encouraged to learn independently well. As a result, they feel very positive about their learning in the sixth form and develop into mature young adults well. The curriculum provides a wide choice of courses at different levels and the range of A level courses is exceptionally good. There are small numbers of students on some courses. Students are supported well in the sixth form but there are too many enrolled on courses not really suited to their needs. As a result, retention and success rates on many courses are too low. Leadership and management is satisfactory. The college has taken the lead in developing the wide curriculum with Newmarket College and is recognised as a leading practitioner in monitoring students performance.

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

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers generally support the college well. Most believe that their children enjoy college and that it keeps them safe. A growing number of parents and carers say that the college informs them well about the children's progress, reflecting the recent steps taken by the staff to improve reporting and communication. A significant number of parents and carers remain concerned about behaviour but their views may not have taken fully into account the very recent improvements that have been made. The number of recorded incidents of misbehaviour has fallen very significantly in the past twelve months. Inspectors found the behaviour in the college is good. They found no evidence to support the view of those parents and carers who say that the college does not help their children to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mildenhall College of Technology 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 118 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 970 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	23	20	79	67	14	12	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	18	15	88	75	9	8	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	23	19	74	63	12	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	21	63	53	19	16	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	14	12	78	66	17	14	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	8	7	74	63	24	20	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	6	73	62	28	24	2	2
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)	11	9	78	66	15	13	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	15	13	73	62	23	19	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	12	62	53	24	20	7	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	11	70	59	15	13	7	6
The school is led and managed effectively	14	12	77	65	9	8	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	22	19	74	63	13	11	3	3

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 all 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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 pupils' 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.



4 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Mildenhall College of Technology, Bury St Edmunds, IP28 7HT

My colleagues and I enjoyed our visit to your college and welcomed the opportunity to see you at work and in your lessons. I thought that you would like to know what we found out.

Your college is good. When your headteacher was appointed it was at a low ebb. The attainment and the progress made by former students were lower than they had been for some time, particularly in English and mathematics, and attendance and behaviour continued to cause concern. Since that time your headteacher and her senior colleagues have made much improvement. Attainment and progress are now good. The senior staff have worked well in partnership with the feeder middle schools and Newmarket College to provide you with a good curriculum, one in which you have wide choices of subjects, particularly in the sixth form. You should be very pleased and grateful to them for what they have done. My colleagues and I found that some of you are not always guided to courses that are best suited to your needs and the way you like to learn. As a result, success rates were not as high as they could otherwise be. We have asked the staff to use the data they have to help you find courses more closely matched to you needs.

When we visited your lessons we found that all your teachers had good relationships with you and plan your lessons well. The use of information and communication technology to enhance your lessons was satisfactory and improving. The best teachers inspired and expected you to learn well. They use questioning to check your understanding well and reinforced what you had been taught when necessary. Not all of your lessons were of this high quality. In too many lessons what they expected from you and the pace of the lessons were inadequate and too slow. You found these lessons uninteresting and sometimes minor misbehaviour occurred. As a result, we have asked your teachers to seek ways to raise the quality of teaching to a more consistent high quality.

The senior staff are ambitious and want to improve the college further. You can help them by working hard and always doing your best work

Yours sincerely

Dr Peter Thompson

Lead inspector

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