

Dene Community School of Technology

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114313
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	357519
Inspection dates	11–12 April 2011
Reporting inspector	Ann Wallis

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	736
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Scott
Headteacher	Mr George Harris
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in 32 lessons and saw 32 teachers teach. They held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and students. They observed the school's work and looked at students' books, safeguarding information, students' progress data and other documentation. They analysed 28 questionnaires from parents and carers and also those from students and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether all groups of students are making the progress of which they are capable, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Whether leaders and managers at all levels are sufficiently effective and self-evaluation sufficiently accurate to sustain the current trend of school improvement.
- The extent to which good practice is being shared to ensure consistently good teaching across the school and what are the features of teaching and learning which support the school's judgement that this is now good.
- The quality and consistency of the guidance given to students on how to improve their work.

Information about the school

This is a below-average-sized secondary school. A well-above-average proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The percentage of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average as is that of students who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average. The school has gained Investors in People status and has a range of awards including anti-bullying and eco-schools awards. It has specialist status as a technology college.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. It is improving rapidly because governance, leadership and management are good. Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate. Governors, leaders and managers have identified and successfully tackled weaknesses in leadership and in teaching so outcomes for students have improved. Attendance has risen, fewer students are persistently absent from school and exclusions have been reduced. The skills and talents of all students are valued and they are given good equal opportunities to succeed. Attainment, albeit from a low base, is now rising quickly and students' progress is accelerating. Leaders and managers have identified appropriate priorities for further improvement and, under the decisive leadership of the headteacher, the school has good capacity for further improvement.

From their individual starting points when they enter the school students make satisfactory progress so their attainment is broadly average when they leave in Year 11. On some measures, such as the percentage of students attaining five higher- grade GCSEs, attainment is above average. However, this masks the fact that attainment in English and mathematics, although now rising rapidly, has been significantly below average for the last three years. Students' progress varies between subjects in response to the variable quality of teaching they receive. The majority of teaching is satisfactory and in these lessons work is sufficiently challenging and appropriately paced to retain the interest of most students. In the best lessons, where teaching is good, the pace of the lesson is brisk, expectations are high and work is well matched to the needs of all students. However, this good practice is not yet fully shared across the school. Work is marked regularly but the quality of feedback given to students is not sufficiently consistent so that they are clear about how to improve their work.

The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory and they know how to stay safe and healthy. The school has developed some productive links with the local community but opportunities for students to engage with communities further afield are limited.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit from an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching from satisfactory to good by:
 - eliminating the remaining inadequate teaching
 - sharing good practice more widely to reduce inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between departments.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

- Maintain the current upward trends in attainment and progress and accelerate these further, particularly in English and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring all lessons proceed at a brisk pace and engage the interest of all students
 - ensuring expectations of all students are high and work is well matched to their needs
 - ensuring students receive consistently high-quality feedback to help them improve their work.
- Improve the promotion of community cohesion by:
 - increasing the opportunities for students to engage with communities and cultures which differ from their own
 - evaluating the impact of this work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

In lessons most students enjoy learning and concentrate on the task in hand. Consequently their achievement is satisfactory. Teachers have good relationships with their students and use praise and encouragement well to build students' confidence and encourage them to contribute to lessons. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make the same progress as their peers because they receive timely and well-focused support from teachers and teaching assistants. In a Year 10 English lesson students were seen to be enjoying learning as they improved their descriptive writing by recording the sounds and smells found on the school site. Work in students' books and the school's own detailed tracking data confirmed the accelerating progress that students are making. School data also indicated that current Year 11 students are on course to attain their challenging targets in English and mathematics this year. Students enter Year 7 with attainment which is below average, particularly in English. From this starting point they make satisfactory progress but their attainment, although broadly average overall, has been significantly weaker in English and mathematics. The school has successfully focused on remedying these weaknesses and in 2010 the proportion of students gaining five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, rose by 18%.

Students have a satisfactory knowledge of how to stay safe and healthy. Many enjoy keeping fit by participating in the good range of sporting activities on offer. Most students feel safe in school and have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for example when using the internet. A few younger students mentioned concerns about bullying but recognised that the school had procedures in place to deal with this should it arise. Students' behaviour is satisfactory. It is often good in lessons but occasionally deteriorates when tasks and activities are not sufficiently varied and engaging to hold students' interest. Students have sound basic skills and value the opportunities they have to take part in work experience, especially through the vocational courses the school offers. Consequently they are satisfactorily prepared for the next stage of their education and for later life.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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 satisfactory in lessons and is sometimes good. A very small amount of inadequate teaching remains but this is rapidly being eradicated. In most lessons teachers provide varied tasks, use interesting resources and the levels of pace and challenge are satisfactory. Most teachers manage students' behaviour well and any reluctant learners are quickly brought back on task. In a few lessons the pace of learning slows when too much time is spent managing behaviour, and work is not as challenging and or well matched to students' needs. In some lessons and in some subjects teaching is good and students make good progress. The school has yet to fully share this good practice across the school in order to reduce inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between the different subjects. Most students are clear about the targets they are aiming for in their work but marking in students' books does not always give clear pointers on how to achieve them.

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets requirements. There is a suitable range of courses to meet the needs of students, particularly those who wish to study a range of vocational courses. The curriculum is currently being reviewed to ensure that the needs of more-able students are met even more fully and an improved programme of personal, social and health education is implemented successfully. A satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities add to students' enjoyment of learning. The school's specialist status in technology has not had a significant impact upon the curriculum.

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Students appreciate the timely and accessible care and support they receive from student and family support workers and from staff. Partnerships overall are satisfactory. The school works effectively with a range of outside agencies to ensure that students needing support, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, get the specialist help they need. Good transition arrangements ensure most Year 7 students settle quickly in to school and the majority of older students are satisfied with the advice they receive to help them prepare for further education or work. Although the school holds regular parents' evenings a minority of parents felt that the school did not keep them sufficiently informed about their children's progress so that they could support their children's learning.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has a very clear vision for further school improvement in order to maintain and accelerate the present upward trend in attainment. He is well supported by a newly appointed senior team with whom he has won the respect of staff and students. Recent improvements to the way in which data are used and students' progress is tracked are driving up attainment and making staff more aware of and accountable for the progress their classes are making. Governance is good. Governors know the school well, are involved in its strategic direction and provide support and challenge in equal measure. All students have good opportunities to succeed and discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. Safeguarding checks on school staff and risk assessments are firmly in place and exemplify good practice. Child protection policies are under review and arrangements are satisfactory. Community cohesion is promoted satisfactorily within the local area but links with communities further afield are presently underdeveloped. The impact of work to promote community cohesion has not been fully evaluated.

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

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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Of the low proportion of parents and carers who filled in the questionnaire, the large majority are pleased with the education the school provides. They are particularly appreciative of the teaching their children receive and of the way the school is led and managed. Inspection evidence found teaching to be satisfactory and leadership and management to be good. A very few parents and carers expressed concerns about the way in which the school keeps them informed about their children's progress and helps them support their children's learning. Inspectors found communication with parents and carers to be satisfactory.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Dene Community School 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 28 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 736 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	3	11	19	68	3	11	3	11
The school keeps my child safe	3	11	22	79	2	7	1	4
My school informs me about my child's progress	4	14	14	50	9	32	1	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	3	11	18	64	4	14	1	4
The teaching is good at this school	2	7	25	89	1	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	3	11	11	39	11	39	1	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	1	4	23	82	2	7	2	7
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)	3	11	18	64	5	18	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	1	4	22	79	3	11	1	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	7	25	16	57	4	14	1	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	1	4	20	71	3	11	2	7
The school is led and managed effectively	1	4	23	82	0	0	2	7
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	3	11	17	61	7	25	1	4

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



13 April 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Dene Community School of Technology, Peterlee, SR8 5RL

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. A particular thank you goes to those of you who took the time to tell us about your work in school. Please thank your parents and carers for filling in the questionnaire. This is what we found out about your school.

- Yours is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school where you make satisfactory progress.
- Your behaviour is satisfactory and you attend school regularly.
- The teaching you receive and the curriculum you follow are all satisfactory.
- The way your school is led and managed is good and it has good capacity to improve further.

These are some of the things we have asked your school to do:

- improve the quality of teaching by encouraging teachers to share their best ideas for good lessons more widely to reduce differences in the quality of teaching between departments
- accelerate the upward trends in attainment and progress, particularly in English and mathematics, by ensuring all lessons proceed at a brisk pace and engage your interest, teachers' expectations are high, work is well matched to your needs and you receive consistently high-quality feedback to help you improve your work
- improve the promotion of community cohesion by increasing the opportunities for you to engage with communities and cultures which differ from your own and by evaluating the impact of this work.

All of you can help your school to improve by continuing to attend school regularly and working with your teachers to achieve the very best you can.

Yours sincerely

Ann Wallis

Lead inspector

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