

Dartford Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118785
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358443
Inspection dates	28–29 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	871
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Fivell
Headteacher	Trish Burleigh
Date of previous school inspection	29 June 2011
School address	Heath Lane Dartford DA1 2LY
Telephone number	01322 224309
Fax number	01322 222445
Email address	admin@dtc.kent.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 44 lessons, taught by 35 different teachers. In addition, they held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and four groups of students. They talked to many students informally. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation, including students' assessed work in lessons. Inspectors analysed 71 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, 21 from staff and 130 from students.

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

- The progress made by students, particularly for different groups of students and in mathematics lessons.
- The extent to which the school is monitoring and improving the quality of its teaching, learning and assessment.
- The impact of the school's specialist technology and applied learning status.
- Whether there is sufficient capacity in the current leadership for sustained and rapid improvement.
- How well the school has improved since the previous inspection.

Information about the school

Dartford Technology College is smaller than the average secondary school. The large majority of students are White British and speak English as their first language. Around 20% of the students are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds with the largest group being of Black African heritage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than that found nationally, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is low. Around a third of higher-attaining pupils from the local primary schools attend neighbouring grammar schools. The school has held specialist technology status since 1997 and specialist status for applied learning since June 2009. It provides joint sixth form provision with four other local schools. The school moved into a new building in March 2009 as part of the Dartford Learning Campus. A new headteacher has been appointed and is due to take up post in September 2011.

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?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The progress that students make declined markedly after the previous inspection but recent improvements indicate it is now satisfactory. However, relative to national averages, attainment has declined and is low in significant areas and the improved progress is yet to have an impact on raising this. Many weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have not been tackled effectively, and the governing body has not appreciated the extent of the school's underperformance. Leaders and managers have made efforts to drive improvement but these have been hindered by the school's self-evaluation processes, which are overgenerous and insufficiently self-critical.

School leaders' analysis and reporting of the performance of different groups of students are insufficiently rigorous. Gaps in achievement between groups of students have widened since the previous inspection because the school has failed to identify these and ensure equality of opportunity successfully. The challenge provided by the governing body is not robust enough. The school's development plan lacks precision. Timescales for actions and improvements are not clear and so progress towards them cannot be effectively monitored. The identification and sharing of best practice are underdeveloped. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is inadequate.

Students enjoy school and say they feel safe and cared for. Bullying is uncommon. Inspectors observed some good behaviour in class, but in a small minority of lessons students' independent learning is weak and is disrupted by low-level chatter. Often this is because teaching is no better than satisfactory and the use of assessment data is weak. The use of assessment to support learning is inadequate and not used effectively to ensure that activities are consistently demanding. As a result, students' attention wanes and has a negative impact on their learning and progress. The quality of marking and written feedback on students work is also too variable, and was a weakness at the previous inspection. In line with the school's specialist status for applied learning, an increasing number of vocational programmes are being introduced to help develop students' work-related skills better and to provide appropriate progression routes through to the sixth form. The overall effectiveness of the school's sixth form is satisfactory. The school generally engages well with parents and carers and has extended the opportunities available for parents and carers to discuss their children's progress.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By January 2012, ensure that steps are in place to ensure that attainment improves significantly and rises towards national averages by:
 - ensuring that managers at all levels systematically identify areas for development and improvement
 - ensuring that the governing body frequently sets and monitors progress towards challenging targets
 - analysing and using data more effectively and consistently at all levels to review students' progress and attainment
 - setting timescales for actions taken to improve and evaluating their impact more rigorously.
- By January 2012, improve the promotion of equal opportunities by:
 - analysing, monitoring and reporting on the performance of different groups of students more comprehensively, clearly identifying any gaps
 - specifically targeting any gaps between groups for improvement so that these can be tackled and narrowed
 - ensuring that the school's managers and the governing body assess effectively the impact of work to promote equalities
 - ensuring that the governing body receives clearer and more comprehensive reports on the performance of different groups.
- By April 2012, significantly raise the proportion of good and better teaching by:
 - improving the use of assessment information in the planning of lessons so that activities and learning aims are suitably challenging for students of all abilities
 - developing teachers' skills in the use of strategies to check that learning is taking place throughout the lesson
 - improving the quality and consistency of written feedback on students' work so that all students are clear about how they can improve and achieve higher grades
 - sharing more effectively the good assessment practice that exists in the school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

4

When students enter the school in Year 7 their prior attainment is below the national average. As they move through the school they make progress that over the last three years has been well below average, with a marked declining trend since the previous inspection. Inspectors' observations in lessons and the school's data indicate that progress has improved this year. Improvement is evident in mathematics, but improvements in English are less clear.

Since the previous inspection the proportion of students that have gained five or more GCSE passes at grade C and above, with and without English and mathematics, has remained well below national averages and the gap has widened. Observations in lessons and scrutiny of students' books support the school's own data which shows improvements

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for the current cohort. However, it is too soon to be sure that a trend of improvement exists, or that it can be sustained. For some subjects, for example in drama, and information and communication technology, no students gained A or A* grades in 2010. In other subjects, for example English language and mathematics, the proportion of these grades was exceptionally low.

Attainment varies too much between different groups of students. For students whose first language is not English and students of minority ethnic heritage, attainment has improved and was broadly average in 2009/10. However, the proportion of White British girls and of students eligible for free school meals gaining at least five A* to C grades including English and mathematics has declined notably over the last three years. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. The extent to which students develop skills of independent and collaborative learning is very variable.

A wide range of opportunities exist for students to take on additional roles and make a contribution to the community. As a result, students develop good levels of self-confidence and extend their interpersonal skills. The organisation and effectiveness of the student council are a strength. The council is given a high profile by the headteacher. Students feel listened to and the school leaders respond quickly to any suggestions they make.

School leaders have increased the range of healthy options available to students and a good range of enrichment activities exist, although the impact of these on students' development is not yet fully evaluated. Attendance is broadly average. Students are improving their work-related skills through the school's developing vocational curriculum which is helping them prepare for life after school. Although few high grades are obtained, students apply basic skills adequately in a range of subjects. Progression after Year 11 to further education, higher education and/or employment is high.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
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	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	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 overall, but the use of assessment in lessons to ensure all students learn effectively is insufficiently well developed and is having too little impact on improving students' attainment throughout the school. The good practice seen in some lessons is not shared effectively to raise the quality of teaching further. Teachers' planning tends to target pupils of middle ability rather than being sufficiently targeted to challenge and extend the learning and progress of students of all abilities. The use of assessment to support and plan learning is not applied consistently through lessons to make sure learning remains rapid. Where teachers use assessment information to plan activities carefully so that all students can be challenged sufficiently to achieve their potential, the pace of learning is good. In these lessons, students are more engaged and their enjoyment is enhanced. The school recognises that the quality of marking and written feedback on students' work remains too variable. While clear and constructive feedback is provided in some subjects, comments to help students improve are perfunctory in others. The use of information and learning technologies to help support teaching and learning is a feature of many lessons. In the best lessons it is used creatively to motivate students.

School leaders are reviewing and changing the curriculum to better meet the needs of students. It is too early to judge the full impact of these changes on students' attainment. The school's new building provides a welcoming and well-resourced learning environment. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory with some positive features. A range of

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transition initiatives, such as the 'feel good group' and Year 7 sanctuary, are successful in helping students settle quickly into school. Pastoral support remains effective and valued by students. Staff monitor students' attendance frequently and have applied a range of strategies to improve attendance. While the in-year attendance overall has improved and is above average, despite the school leaders' many efforts, attendance is not nearly as good for some groups of students. Impartial guidance helps students to make informed decisions about their future. The tracking of individual progress is satisfactory. Most students are now on track for their target grades, but many students reported not finding these challenging enough. The impact of specialist status on improving attainment more widely across the school is limited.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
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?

Outcomes have deteriorated since the previous inspection and leaders, managers and governors have failed to take decisive action to prevent this. Leaders and managers are committed to improving outcomes for their students, but the measures that have been introduced have not had sufficient impact. Monitoring of the school's performance is weak and the governing body have not made sufficient challenge to declining trends that have been evident since the previous inspection. Improvements in progress seen during the inspection are too recent to be sure that they will overcome the momentum of decline. Much data are produced on student performance but these are not always used consistently or effectively by managers at all levels to monitor trends in performance, particularly against national standards. The extent to which leaders, managers and the governing body embed ambition and driven improvement is inadequate.

The management of teaching and learning is inadequate. The school's identification of strengths and weaknesses was broadly similar to that of inspectors in joint observations undertaken during the inspection. However, actions to improve weaknesses identified in the use of assessment at the previous inspection have not been effective.

The governing body is supportive of the school and brings a number of strengths to its role. However, since the previous inspection the governing body has not been sufficiently self-critical or challenging in order to reverse the decline in attainment. The monitoring of progress against insufficiently challenging targets has been weak. Written reports to the governing body are not always in a clearly summarised format. As a result, the governing body is not always in a position to challenge and monitor performance as effectively as it should. The analysis, monitoring and reporting of the performance of different groups is inadequate. A single equality policy has been recently drafted but school leaders do not

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systematically assess the impact of the promotion of equality, including the performance of different groups of students.

School leaders engage well with parents and carers. Initiatives such as Year 11 revision evenings have been well received. Texting has been recently introduced to help keep parents and carers informed of school events and notify them if their children are absent. Partnerships have a satisfactory impact in supporting students' well-being.

The governing body has ensured that safeguarding requirements are met, for example staff have received appropriate training. The school presents a cohesive community. Community links are developing through the school's specialist status. However, school leaders have not evaluated comprehensively the effectiveness of these links.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	4
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	4

Sixth form

Most sixth form students make progress in line with expectations. The majority of students undertaking vocational programmes make good progress and pass their qualifications successfully. Students' achievement on academic programmes is more uneven, particularly on AS-level courses, and very few students gain high grades. The proportion of students who stay on through the sixth form is high. Progression rates are good. A good range of opportunities exists for students to take on additional responsibilities which helps develop their interpersonal skills. The sixth-form-led school council is managed well and is very effective.

Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory. In the best lessons, students are encouraged to engage actively in their learning and in discussion, and questioning is used very well to extend their understanding. In less effective lessons teachers do not always have sufficiently high expectations of what learners can, and should, achieve in the lesson

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time. The curriculum provides an appropriate range of programmes and progression routes. Changes to existing programmes and new courses, such as geography and history A level, have been introduced and are proving popular with students.

The sixth form is led appropriately and actions taken to improve progression post-16 are proving successful, with just under half of all students leaving the sixth form in 2009/10 progressing successfully to higher education. However, the strategic overview and evaluation of performance in the sixth form is not comprehensive. The analysis and reporting of the achievements of different groups of students are less well developed. Effective systems are in place to check the quality of provision, but targets, success measures and timescales are not sufficiently sharp to measure improvement in all aspects. The effectiveness of subject leadership in the sixth form is uneven.

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

A fairly low proportion of parents returned completed questionnaires during the inspection. Most parents and carers who responded were supportive of the school's work. A quarter of responses were from parents and carers who did not feel the school helped them to support their children's learning. The inspection team looked closely at this and did not find evidence to support the view. A few commented that the quality of teaching and learning was variable and did not feel that their children were making enough progress. Inspection findings endorsed the majority of parental views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Dartford Technology College 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 71 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 871 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	20	28	48	68	3	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	20	28	47	66	2	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	18	25	39	55	12	17	2	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	21	45	63	9	13	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	19	27	43	61	8	11	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	20	38	54	15	21	3	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	17	42	59	12	17	3	4
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)	15	21	41	58	6	8	3	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	27	45	63	2	3	3	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	32	37	52	8	11	2	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	18	37	52	12	17	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	15	21	47	66	7	10	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	35	38	54	6	8	2	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



30 June 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Dartford Technology College, Dartford DA1 2LY

I would like to thank you all for welcoming me and my four colleagues to your school. We talked with many of you, visited your classes, looked closely at your work and at many other aspects of the school. Throughout this you were courteous and helpful and I would like to thank you for that. We were also pleased to receive a number of questionnaires from you and your parents and carers.

We found that your school is not performing as well as it should. There are many improvements that it needs to make to ensure that standards rise and that you all make the best possible progress. Because of this we have placed your school in special measures. This means that improvements will be closely monitored by inspectors in the coming months.

We found your sixth form to be satisfactory with some positive features.

There are three areas the school should focus on to improve further.

- Raising your attainment and accelerating your progress by sharing more extensively the very best teaching and assessment practice, particularly to make sure you are challenged in lessons and receive clear explanations about how to improve your work.
- Ensuring that school leaders, managers and governors monitor the school's performance more thoroughly, so they are able to take swift and effective action to improve your results.
- Ensuring that the staff analyses, monitors and reports more thoroughly on the performance of different groups of students so that you all achieve equally well.

Finally, the staff can only go so far with these improvements without your help. You can all help by asking if you are unsure, and by working with the school to help it improve.

Thank you again for your help in this inspection and we would like to wish you all the best in your studies and every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins

Her Majesty's Inspector

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