

Dartford Science and Technology College

Heath Lane, Dartford, Kent, DA1 2LY

Inspection dates 21–22 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The school's headteacher, supported by a very effective governing body, provides inspiring and skilled leadership. He has the respect of teachers and students and has made significant improvements to the school in a very short time. The sixth form is good.
- Teaching is consistently good, with some that is outstanding and very little that requires improvement. As a result, students, including those in the sixth form, disabled students and those with special educational needs, make good progress in lessons. Younger students are making particularly fast progress.
- Students' attainment at GCSE is rising sharply towards the national average.
- All students have an equal chance to succeed. Vulnerable students do just as well as other students. This is because the school is using government funding (pupil premium) very effectively and teachers make special efforts to help these students both in and out of lessons.
- The atmosphere in school is calm and cheerful. Students are proud of their new uniform and enjoy their learning. They behave well, attend regularly and are ambitious to succeed.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding.
- More-able students do not always make as much progress as they could.
- Some students in Year 11 did not make enough progress when they were younger. Although they are catching up, they are not making as much progress from Year 7 as other students.
- The school does not plan systematically to develop students' spiritual and cultural awareness.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 26 lessons, of which five were jointly observed with a member of the school’s leadership team. In addition, one inspector did two learning walks, making a number of short visits to lessons to look at behaviour and at provision for lower-ability students, disabled students and those with special educational needs.
- Meetings were held with three groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, two other members of the governing body and school staff, including senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors took account of 18 responses to the online Parent View survey during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work, and looked at a number of documents, including the school’s own data on achievement, self-evaluation, improvement planning, staff training, records relating to behaviour and attendance, documents relating to safeguarding, and students’ work.

Inspection team

Mary Massey, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Hugh Betterton

Additional inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- Dartford Science and Technology College is smaller than the average secondary school. Around a quarter of higher-attaining pupils from the local primary schools attend neighbouring grammar schools.
- The large majority of students are White British and speak English as their first language. About a fifth of the students are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority and those with a parent or carer serving in the armed forces) is lower than average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs that are supported through school action or school action plus is close to that found nationally. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is high.
- A very small number of students spend a short time each week in alternative provision at Milestone Special School.
- Sixth form provision is provided jointly with two other local schools.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- When the school was inspected in June 2011, it was judged to require special measures. Since then the school has been inspected on two occasions. A new headteacher joined the school in September 2011. At the last monitoring visit in May 2012, the school was judged to be making good progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make more teaching outstanding so standards improve further, particularly for higher-attaining students and those in the current Year 11, by:
 - making sure that the work students are given is hard enough
 - improving the quality of questioning to deepen understanding
 - using information from marking and conversations with students in lessons to adapt activities to meet their needs.
- Provide more opportunities through the curriculum to extend students' spiritual and cultural development.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The school has a reliable system for checking on students' progress regularly, so teachers know how much progress each individual is making. Students know what they are expected to achieve and are ambitious to do well. In lessons, because teaching is good, students make good progress. The personal targets set for students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are very ambitious and most students are meeting them.
- Students arrive at the school with Key Stage 2 results significantly below the national average. GCSE results have improved over the last three years, and in 2012 showed a sharp rise towards the national average, but are better in English than in mathematics. Students in Year 11 did not make as much progress as they should have done when they were younger, especially in mathematics. The school is providing good quality teaching and extensive help before examinations, and the rate at which these students make progress has speeded up. GCSE results are on track to be better still in 2013. There has been some early entry to GCSE in the past, and this is being phased out. Students value the effort teachers make to go the 'extra mile' by providing after-school sessions (Flexi-7) each day. Attendance at these sessions is high for all year groups, and is helping to make up for slower progress in previous years.
- In lessons, disabled students and those with special educational needs make as much progress as other students, because teachers know the best ways to help them. Students who are eligible for the pupil premium also make good progress. The school has found creative ways of using extra funding to help give these students confidence and support. For example, among other things, extra time is provided for teachers so they can give personal feedback to individual students about their work. Minority ethnic students, the few who do not have English as their first language and those in alternative provision also make good progress.
- The curriculum for Years 7, 8 and 9 changed at the start of this term to give more time to English and mathematics in order to help raise standards, because many students arrive at the school with weak reading and writing skills. In every subject, teachers help develop students' English skills through marking and by encouraging wider vocabulary. Use of the school library has increased over the last year, and all students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are given time in school to read regularly.
- In the sixth form, students are making good progress as a result of good teaching. The rate at which they made progress was significantly faster in 2012 than in previous years.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Extensive training and coaching are provided for teachers. They work together to share their skills, and are ambitious to improve. As a result, teaching is consistently good, and some lessons seen during the inspection were outstanding. Very few lessons required improvement and none was inadequate. When teachers plan lessons they consider what activities to provide to make sure that every single student can make progress, but they are not as good at providing suitable work for higher-attaining students as they are for those who have more difficulty learning. Sometimes the teacher does not adapt the lesson when conversations with students show that the activities need changing because the work is too easy or too difficult.
- Students often work in groups and help one another. Although this way of working is new, they get on with the tasks they are given enthusiastically and behave very well. Teachers explain exactly what students need to do to improve and to reach their targets, and make sure that the work provided is suitable for each individual's needs. Students work well independently but have the confidence to ask questions when they are stuck and their neighbours cannot help. Sometimes the higher-attaining students do not make as much progress as the others because teachers do not expect enough of them and ask questions that will encourage thinking and extend their understanding.

- The new special educational needs coordinator has made sure that the right students have been identified as needing extra help and has started to involve parents and carers in planning targets for them. Teachers are provided with useful information about the best way to provide support and this is used in lesson planning. These students say that they are well cared for by both teachers and teaching assistants.
- Work is generally marked regularly and promptly. Teachers provide guidance on how to improve as well as praise for work done well. Often the marking gives a grade so students know how well they are doing, and this helps to motivate them. Arrangements for homework are being reviewed because the school knows that it is set inconsistently at the moment.
- In the few weaker lessons, the teacher often talks for too long, students lose interest and the pace of learning is slower. Work may be too hard for some and too easy for others because the teacher does not use information from tests and marking to plan work at the right level.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students take learning seriously. They enjoy themselves, concentrate well and take an active part in lessons, especially when they work in groups. Around the school they are polite, considerate and tolerant of others. Students who joined the school recently, including those who did not speak English when they arrived, told inspectors that they found other students welcoming, friendly and kind. Disabled students and those with special educational needs also feel safe. The school is beginning to involve sixth formers more in working with younger students, for example in helping with reading in Year 7.
- Behaviour is managed well and students respond quickly when they are corrected. Exclusions have fallen substantially over the last year. Students are aware of the different kinds of bullying and feel very confident about approaching staff for support, especially their tutors and learning managers. Some students said that they felt that although issues such as racism and homophobia were dealt with very well, sometimes less serious incidents were not handled so consistently.
- Nearly all the small number of parents and carers who responded to Parent View are positive about the school and feel that their daughters were happy and safe.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is highly visible in school, visiting classrooms and talking to students daily. His overwhelming priority, shared and understood by all staff, is to improve the quality of teaching so students can make the maximum progress. One student said, 'He cares about all of us, not just the ones on the C/D borderline.' All leaders are constantly checking the progress of different groups of students, to make sure that no-one is left behind.
- Senior leaders know the school very well and their self-evaluation is accurate. Planning is tightly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning, and progress towards targets is checked regularly. All staff know their role in contributing to improvement and are held to account through an effective performance management process, with salaries closely linked to whether targets are met.
- The pace of change has been exceptional. In the last year there have been substantial changes in staffing, reorganisation of the leadership team, and much wider responsibilities for middle leaders. The quality of teaching and marking is checked regularly and rigorously, and teachers are set demanding targets. The headteacher has nevertheless managed to create a very positive, confident atmosphere where staff feel very accountable for how well their students learn but are also secure enough to admit shortcomings and accept help to improve. Personalised coaching and training are provided, often using expertise already in the school, and the result has been impressive improvements in leadership, teaching and the quality of learning.
- A new curriculum has been introduced at the start of this academic year. In the sixth form, students can now study a mixture of vocational and academic courses. Students in Years 10 and

11 have a choice of vocational subjects as well as the English Baccalaureate to meet the needs of students' different abilities and interests. Everyone follows a broad and balanced programme including creative subjects and performing arts. For Years 7, 8 and 9 there is more time for English and mathematics.

- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. However, although there are many activities both in and out of lessons that develop students' spiritual and cultural awareness, this is not planned for systematically in the curriculum, so students do not all have equal access to them.
- Arrangements for keeping students safe are thorough and effective. Students are aware of risk and how to keep themselves safe. The headteacher is planning developments to improve the quality of sex education and training in e-safety.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have kept a regular and rigorous check on the school's achievement data and the quality of teaching while the school has been in special measures. They have made a significant difference to the rate at which the school has improved. Where necessary they have challenged the school's leaders but also provided support in tackling underperformance and rewarding success. They visit the school regularly and are improving their links with parents and carers.
 - The governing body has considered its own strengths and weaknesses and produced its own improvement plan in order to strengthen its influence and improve its effectiveness. The information governors are given by the school is accurate and not too detailed, and governors are trained so they understand it. The best use is made of individual governors' skills and expertise.
 - Statutory responsibilities are fully met including safeguarding and making sure that students all have an equal opportunity to succeed.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	118785
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	397945

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	787
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Edwards
Headteacher	Seamus Murphy
Date of previous school inspection	28–29 June 2011
Telephone number	01322 224309
Fax number	01322 222455
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