



# Solway Community Technology College

Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 112377  
**LEA** Cumbria  
**Inspection number** 278917  
**Inspection dates** 1 March 2006 to 2 March 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mrs Ruth James HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Liddell Street
<b>School category</b>	Community		Silloth
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16		Wigton, Cumbria
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01697 331234
<b>Number on roll</b>	243	<b>Fax number</b>	01697 332749
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mrs Frances McIntyre
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	1 November 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Susie Shepherd

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	1 March 2006 - 2 March 2006	278917

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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

## **Description of the school**

The school is situated in a rural part of West Cumbria and takes most of its pupils from the small town of Silloth. The school is much smaller than average and it has very few pupils of minority ethnic heritage. Most pupils come from areas with average levels of disadvantage. Since September 2004 the school has had specialist technology college status. Overall the number of pupils with additional learning needs is slightly higher than average, and there are more pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need than is typical. The school is part of a group of Cumbria schools which work together as a rural academy.

## **Key for inspection grades**

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the progress and standards achieved during Key Stage 3.

The overall effectiveness of the school has declined since the last inspection and is now inadequate. Pupils' General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results are about average, although in 2004 fewer pupils achieved five or more A\* to C grades. Standards at Key Stage 3 have declined and pupils do not achieve as much as they are capable of. Pupils who took the Key Stage 3 national tests in 2005 made exceptionally slow progress between Year 7 and Year 9 in English, mathematics and science. Technology college status has led to improvements in the facilities for information and communications technology (ICT), but has not yet had an impact on standards across the school.

Teachers know pupils well and there is satisfactory provision for pupils' personal development and well-being. Attendance is improving and behaviour is satisfactory overall, although in some Key Stage 3 lessons a few pupils behave inappropriately. The number of exclusions has fallen recently. Pupils benefit from the cultural opportunities afforded by a link with Mexico City. Although teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, they are not as good as at the last inspection. There are too few good lessons, particularly during Key Stage 3. There are weaknesses in lesson planning, and too often activities do not meet the needs of the full ability range and engage all pupils. Curriculum provision is satisfactory with some good aspects such as the extracurricular sporting activities. Pupils are cared for well but their academic guidance is not as effective as it should be.

Inspectors agreed with many of the school's judgements, but the significance of the pupils' unsatisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 was underestimated in the school's own evaluation of its effectiveness. Better systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of education are needed. The school is in a position to move forward. The leadership of the new headteacher has successfully renewed the focus on the key task of raising achievement. The use of performance data is developing. Other improvements, for example in GCSE results between 2004 and 2005, also demonstrate that the school has the capacity to improve.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3.
- Improve teachers' planning of lessons to ensure that activities meet the needs of the full ability range and engage all pupils.
- Establish effective strategies to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision, and make better use of performance data to inform teaching

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 4**

The school did not meet all its targets in 2005. Overall standards have generally been below average at Key Stage 3, and they have declined in recent years. Pupils do not achieve as much as would be expected on the basis of their results in Key Stage 2 national tests. In English, mathematics and science pupils' progress is well below average, and this has been the case for a few years. For pupils who sat their Key Stage 3 tests in 2005 progress was particularly poor in all three subjects.

In Key Stage 4 pupils make much better progress than at Key Stage 3, so that their GCSE results are in line with expectations given their attainment on entry to the school. Progress in English was very good during Key Stage 4 for those pupils who took GCSEs in 2005. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades is usually around the national average, although in 2004 it was much lower than this. The A\* to C pass rates for both English language and mathematics improved considerably in 2005 and nearly half the pupils who sat their GCSEs in 2005 attained at least five A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics. This was a big improvement on 2004, when only just over one quarter of pupils did so. Pupils do particularly well in GCSEs in English, art and design, design and technology, and physical education. They do not do as well in French, history and geography. Very few pupils leave the school with no qualifications.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Attendance has improved and is broadly average, though the attendance of a small minority of pupils in Year 10 is poor. The school is an orderly place in which pupils feel safe and secure. Most pupils behave sensibly. However, in a significant number of lessons in Key Stage 3, a few pupils behave inappropriately and disrupt learning. The number of pupils excluded for a fixed period has dropped dramatically in recent months as more alternatives are found to provide an appropriate curriculum and support.

The pupils' spiritual moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Religious education lessons provide good opportunities for pupils to reflect on spiritual issues. Assemblies reinforce the ethos of the school but do not always give opportunities for reflection. In morning registration sessions with personal tutors, pupils are not kept occupied with relevant activities, so they are not well prepared for the day of learning ahead. Although some opportunities for celebration of pupils' achievements are taken, others are missed.

Pupils know how to keep healthy. They appreciate healthy lunches and good sporting opportunities. A well-planned programme of personal, social and health education helps pupils understand how to keep safe. Pupils make a good contribution to their own and the local community. The school council has helped to improve school meals

and has a realistic agenda of proposals. Pupils raise considerable sums for charities. Older pupils take on responsibility seriously, though some younger pupils feel that they are not treated courteously by all prefects. Pupils develop satisfactory levels of basic skills and learn to work co-operatively helping them to prepare for their futures.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are more good lessons in Years 10 and 11, than in Years 7 to 9. There is a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching is better in subjects where pupils make good progress and achieve well, for example, in physical education.

Pupils appreciate the help and support that most teachers give them and relationships between teachers and pupils are mostly positive. Pupils make good progress and enjoy lessons where they are involved in practical work or take part in well-planned group work and discussions. Most pupils know their target levels or grades and what they must do to reach them. This has helped to improve pupils' aspirations and interest in learning, especially in Key Stage 4. Pupils make less progress in the significant proportion of lessons where planning is weak and activities are not always well matched to pupils' individual needs and abilities. Pupils find some lessons dull and their attitude and behaviour deteriorates when there is little variety in the learning activities and lessons consist of too much listening to the teacher talk, writing and copying. In some lessons in Key Stage 3 pupils chatter or do not pay enough attention and so the pace of learning slows down.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support where they are taught in small groups out of main lessons. Their needs are not always fully met in lessons because teachers and teaching assistants do not take enough account of the specific targets set out in their individual educational plans.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

Curriculum provision is satisfactory overall, and some aspects are good. At Key Stage 4 the curriculum includes a few vocational options and pupils also have the opportunity to attend local colleges. Links with other local schools are sought to enhance the range of options. Alternative arrangements are made for a small number of pupils who are at risk of not completing their education. Technology college status has enabled the school to improve facilities for ICT and all pupils now study ICT at KS4. There are suitable arrangements to develop work-related learning, including work experience.

The school's link with Mexico City and the associated exchange visits enhance the curriculum and broaden the cultural experiences of pupils in this rural area.

Not all pupils have two hours of physical education per week, but there is good extracurricular provision in sport, in which many pupils participate. The school runs a few clubs and activities, although pupils would like more opportunities particularly during the school day. Some of the time spent with personal tutors is not used constructively.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Staff know individual pupils well. They provide good personal support and relationships are good. The current arrangements for academic guidance and tracking progress are not rigorous enough. Systems to recognise and support pupils who underachieve are improving in Key Stage 4, but they are not yet effective enough in Key Stage 3. Pupils' behaviour, personal development and attendance are tracked closely. Younger pupils appreciate the rewards and consider most sanctions as fair. Older pupils are currently reviewing the rewards system. The school has not developed a consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour in lessons. There are also inconsistencies in the support provided by teaching assistants in lessons.

Pupils receive suitable advice and support from the Connexions service and staff in school in preparation for the next stage of education. The policy for child protection is being updated. Not all staff have received recent training but this is planned for the near future.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Inspectors agreed with the school that leadership and management are satisfactory. The newly appointed headteacher provides clear direction to the school and staff. Her thorough analysis of data has brought a renewed focus and vigour to strategies to improve teaching and learning and raise achievement, particularly at Key Stage 3. Weekly school improvement meetings are held and all teachers attend. Managers at all levels are committed to the school, share a strong sense of common purpose and strive to seek further improvement. Until recently, however, they did not make best use of all the available data, or give sufficient attention and emphasis to Key Stage 3. The school's own judgements about the quality of its provision underestimated the significance of pupils' unsatisfactory progress during Key Stage 3. The new school development plan correctly identifies areas for improvement and includes appropriate actions. The management of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is not yet sufficiently robust to ensure that teaching is planned to take account of all pupils' needs.

New approaches to managing behaviour are beginning to have an impact. For example, the number of exclusions has fallen significantly. Further evidence of the school's capacity to improve includes the better ICT provision, changes to the Key Stage 4

curriculum and the improved GCSE results in English and mathematics between 2004 and 2005.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors have monitored the performance of the school but have not been sufficiently challenging with regard to the results.

Resources are generally used appropriately and the school benefits from the public library on the same site. The school has plans to address the likely shortfall in its budget this year, but this deficit and pupils' unsatisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 mean that at present the school does not give satisfactory value for money.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	4	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	4	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	3	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	4	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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The School Council

Solway Community Technology College

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3 March 2006

Dear Pupils

Thank you for welcoming the inspectors into your school. We were able to visit lessons and to talk to a number of you and to the staff. We also looked at the results of questionnaires sent in by your parents. They are mainly supportive of the school.

Since the time of the last inspection the school has gained specialist technology college status and the facilities for information and communication technology have improved. Older pupils told us that this has made a big difference and they like the way electronic whiteboards are used in lessons.

The GCSE results for your school are usually around the average, although they were not as good in 2004. During Key Stage 3, however, you do not make as much progress as you should, so that the results of the Year 9 assessments in English, mathematics and science are not as good as they could be. You need to try even harder to achieve the best results you can.

Your teachers know you well. Some of your lessons are good and most others are satisfactory. You told us that you particularly enjoy lessons where there are practical activities or you are involved in group discussions. In a small number of lessons a few of you do not pay enough attention and do not behave sensibly, which stops you and other pupils from learning as well as you could. All of you need to behave sensibly in all lessons so that you can learn as much as possible.

You have a choice of courses at Key Stage 4, including GCSEs and vocational courses. Some of you also have the opportunity to attend the local college. The school provides some good extracurricular opportunities for you, including sporting opportunities and the exchange trip to Mexico City. You told us that you would like more activities at lunchtime.

The most important thing the school has to do now is to improve the standards at Key Stage 3. Your headteacher knows what she wants to do. She is working hard with all the staff to improve your school, and make the teaching even better so that all of you learn well and make good progress in all your lessons.

We are confident your headteacher and staff can do this and we are sure that you are willing to put in the hard work. We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth James

Her Majesty's Inspector