



Sponne School Technology College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122051
Local Authority Northamptonshire
Inspection number 292305
Inspection dates 28–29 November 2006
Reporting inspector Nasim Butt

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Brackley Road
School category	Community		Towcester
Age range of pupils	11–18		NN12 6DJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01327 350284
Number on roll (school)	1267	Fax number	01327 359061
Number on roll (6th form)	215		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	E Craven
		Headteacher	J Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	6 November 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	28–29 November 2006	292305

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Sponne School has been a technology college since 1998 and is larger than average. Its students are almost entirely from White British backgrounds, coming from less deprived areas than the average for Northamptonshire. The number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities (with and without statements of special educational need) is below the national average. The school plays an active part in the SWAN group of schools (11 secondary schools in the South and West of Northamptonshire) that is committed to driving 14-19 curriculum change.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Sponne School Technology College is a satisfactory school. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form. The school's curriculum meets most students' needs well, although in some subjects more able students, particularly boys, are not being challenged enough to develop deeper levels of thinking. Many students take part in the wide range of additional sporting and other activities offered. The school actively promotes the healthy lifestyles adopted by most and has done well to ensure students' attendance is consistently above average. Good links with further education providers and involvement with community projects mean students are prepared well for the world of work. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form.

At the end of Year 9 standards have been raised to above the national average in all subjects. Standards are also above average at the end of Year 11, although they vary between subjects. Students' achievement at the end of Year 11 is satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress overall in both the main school and the sixth form, and they make particularly good progress in mathematics and good progress in science in Years 7 to 9. A Year 7 parent summed up this key strength of the school, which is increasingly sustained to the end of Year 11: 'Sponne School has exceeded our expectations for our daughter...She had always struggled with maths and had a real dislike of the subject, but her progress in maths at Sponne has been incredible and is now one of her favourite subjects.'

The personal development and well-being of students are satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Parents and students have generally positive views about the school but a small minority also express concerns about behaviour in some lessons and around the school. The arrangements for transition from primary schools are highly regarded by pupils. An effective induction programme supports this process and enables students to settle quickly into the school. The designation of the school as a technology college has benefited other areas of the curriculum through the effective use of educational technology and the drive to raise standards through improving literacy across the curriculum.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school has recently become more focused on the need to monitor the quality of teaching and learning across the school to minimise the inconsistencies between faculties. Leaders and managers have a clear view of the school's strengths and of what needs to be improved to ensure that all students reach their full potential. The work of pastoral middle leaders in using assessment data to identify and support underachievement is now having a positive impact on the academic and personal development of students. However, the use of assessment data by teachers is not as effective as it could be to help students to make better progress in lessons.

Governors are committed to the success of the school and are very supportive of its values and ethos. They work well with the headteacher and the senior leadership team. The school has been successful in tackling most of the issues raised in the last

inspection. The senior leadership team has introduced some important changes with considerable passion and drive, resulting in standards rising for the 2006 national tests at the end of Year 9. This demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students make satisfactory progress in the sixth form and reach average standards by the time they leave. Their achievement is satisfactory. Students' personal development is good, as they respond well to the developing initiatives of the school to foster greater personal responsibility, both at an individual and community level. Teaching and learning are satisfactory with good, supportive relationships between teachers and students. Lessons are often well tailored to meet individual needs. Most students appreciate having challenging targets and careful marking which relates well to examination criteria. However, there is inconsistency in all of these areas between subjects. The school's leaders do not monitor lessons closely enough to develop a more coherent approach to learning. The leadership of the sixth form is overall satisfactory, with particular strengths in creating a supportive and challenging environment which is well appreciated by students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Take more account of the individual needs of learners so that teaching and learning are consistently good or better throughout the school.
- Develop and sharpen assessment strategies that better support all students to help them achieve their targets.
- Develop the deeper level thinking skills of more able students, particularly boys, through more challenging teaching, so that they achieve as well as they can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

On entry to the school in Year 7, students' standards are above average. They make satisfactory progress overall and, by the end of Year 9, standards are still above average. In 2005 pupils reached only average standards in the national tests in English, but the English results in 2006 improved, particularly at the higher levels. Mathematics, where students make good progress, and science, where they make generally good progress, are strengths in Years 7 to 9

Students make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11, and standards at the end of Year 11 are above the national average. There is some variation between subjects, though students achieve consistently above average standards in most. The school is aware of the uneven progress that students make in different subjects and has embarked on a series of measures to improve teaching and learning and so ensure greater consistency and higher standards across the key stage. Early indications suggest that actions are having a positive impact.

Girls generally perform better than boys at the end of Years 9 and 11. Higher attaining boys do not perform as well as they could at the end of Year 11, with some students not meeting their academic targets.

In the sixth form, students' attainment and progress vary from year to year and across subjects. Examination results improved in 2006. Standards and achievement are satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school actively promotes the development of healthy lifestyles and is working well towards achieving the National Healthy Standards Award. As a result, students are making increasingly healthy lifestyle choices. Most students enjoy coming to school. Attendance is above average and has been consistently good since the previous inspection. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is satisfactory, although a small minority of parents and younger students reported concerns about the unsatisfactory behaviour of some students in Years 10 and 11. The school has taken action and students with behavioural and emotional difficulties receive good support and guidance from the behaviour support assistant. Learning support assistants and external agencies are now being targeted more effectively to support students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for who English is an additional language. Students experiencing difficult circumstances are supported well by the school.

Students value and make the most of the opportunities for work-related learning available. They participate extensively in a wide programme of sporting and other extra-curricular activities and show positive attitudes towards their learning experiences out of school hours. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is satisfactory. In assemblies and through the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum they evaluate and reflect on important experiences in life. Links with primary schools are good and help to ensure a smooth transition for Year 7 students. In the sixth form students make many contributions to their school and local community through support for charities and by taking positions of responsibility. With maturity and good behaviour demonstrated consistently, students' personal development and well-being are good in the sixth form.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The working relationships between students and their teachers support learning well. In the main, teachers prepare lessons well ensuring a systematic approach to the delivery of lessons. Learning objectives are

clarified and revisited during the course of the lesson to assess the learning gains. Good teaching and learning in some subjects uses techniques such as regular and very effective questioning to develop the content of the lesson and check students' knowledge and understanding. In a top set mathematics lesson for example, questioning was used very effectively to encourage students to explain the reasoning behind their solution to a problem and this helped them and others in the class to consolidate their knowledge and understanding. In a sixth form law lesson, effective class organisation enabled students to work in pairs on subject matter matched to their needs and abilities so that all made very good progress. A significant number of lessons, although competently taught, are not as well matched to the range of needs and abilities in the class as they could be. Teaching methods and resources do not always take sufficient account of the differing needs of students. As a result, some students, often the more able, do not make the progress they could. Comprehensive assessment data on students are used effectively by some teachers to set challenging targets but this is not yet consistent across all areas of learning. The school is aware of the main strengths and weaknesses in teaching as a result of its secure approach to monitoring. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are also satisfactory, resulting in satisfactory progress by the end of Years 12 and 13.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum fully meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and is enhanced by after school activities, trips and visits. Since the previous inspection the school has widened the range of choices available in Year 10 to match the needs of students. More opportunities for gifted and talented students are being developed as part of the drive to raise achievement in the main school. A good range of vocational and business-related courses complement traditional GCSE courses. Options in English have been extended and now encompass media studies in addition to language and literature options. Through business enterprise days and work placements, all students in Years 10 and 11 are introduced to the wider world of work. Good links with local colleges support work-related courses at Key Stage 4 and an alternative curriculum that is providing motivation for lower attaining students. Students are enthusiastic about the growing range of after school 'enhancement' opportunities particularly in sport, technology and music. A wide range of instrumental and choral activities are enjoyed by many students. Homework clubs and opportunities to develop and improve coursework are also valued and well supported by students. In the sixth form the widening of course provision has been less effective in attracting students and this is an area identified by the school for further review and development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has good procedures for safeguarding students and is considering improvements to the school site to further improve its security. The majority of students feel safe in the school, although a few younger students have some concerns regarding the large number of students around the school at times. Students know who to approach if they have concerns. Effective systems support all students when joining the school and special arrangements are made for students with additional needs at this stage. Learning support and pastoral staff provide a good level of support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school recognises that it needs to develop further the effectiveness of its procedures for monitoring students' progress across all subjects. The majority of students know their targets and progress is reviewed during the 'Progress Review' day. However, some students do not receive enough guidance on what they need to do to achieve their targets. Students feel they have sufficient information and guidance on future choices which is provided through assemblies, personal, social and health education, and through the careers work of the Connexions service. The school has links with a wide range of outside agencies which provide additional support for students. Sixth formers speak enthusiastically of the high quality support and academic guidance they receive and, in the sixth form, care, guidance and support are good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Members of the leadership team have a good understanding of the major strengths and weaknesses of the school and are working to raise standards further. They have identified areas where improvement is needed, for example developing the effectiveness of middle leaders in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, which is viewed as a priority. Middle leaders, some of whom have been appointed recently, are well supported and guided by the leadership team. Self-evaluation is satisfactory for the school as a whole although its quality varies between different subject areas. Effective student tracking procedures have been put in place by the senior leadership team but they have not had sufficient impact in all subjects. Resources are used efficiently and the achievement of technology college status has benefited other areas of the curriculum, particularly the drive to raise standards in literacy across the curriculum. Progress has been made since the last inspection in improving information and communication technology (ICT) provision. Governance is satisfactory. Adult vetting procedures are in place and the governing body ensures that statutory responsibilities are met. Governors are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and the work being done to raise standards.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for the valuable contribution you made to your school's inspection on 28–29 November. We enjoyed our discussions with you and got much from them.

Your school provides a satisfactory education for its students. Its main strengths are:

- a good curriculum in the main school, giving you a good range of courses to choose from and preparing you well for the world of work
- a good range of extra-curricular activities in sport, music and community projects that many of you are fond of partaking in
- a strong emphasis on healthy lifestyles and good access to learning resources.
- We have asked your school to do three main things to bring about improvement:
- more of the satisfactory teaching needs to become good to bring about better learning and even higher standards compared to what they are now
- your progress could improve further if better use was made of your assessment data to support your learning in some subjects
- the more able among you need higher levels of challenge so you do as well as you can.

Some younger students also told us that in some lessons and around the school the behaviour of a small minority of students is not good. Although we did not see any poor behaviour during the two days we spent in your school, I have passed on your concerns for the senior leadership team to deal with. For your part, you can make things better by working with your teachers to set yourselves challenging targets and by putting in that extra bit of effort to ensure you meet them.