

Solway Community Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112377
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	295382
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Brian Dower

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 on roll	
School	227
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Frances McIntyre
Headteacher	Mrs Susie Shepherd
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Liddell Street Silloth Wigton Cumbria CA7 4DD
Telephone number	01697 331234
Fax number	01697 332749

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Inspection number	295382

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Solway Community Technology College serves the small town of Silloth. It is much smaller than the average size comprehensive school. Students are of white British heritage. The full ability range is represented in the intake and overall attainment on entry to the school is average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. In September 2004 the school was awarded specialist technology college status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Solway Community Technology College is a satisfactory school with good features. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the college no longer requires significant improvement. The recent improvement in results at Key Stage 3 testifies to the improving quality of teaching and learning, and the headteacher's determination to drive up standards. Students' personal development and well-being are good. The college has made outstanding links with other institutions and the local community to broaden and enrich the curriculum. Teachers and teaching assistants are committed to ensuring all students are treated equally and that every student receives good care and support.

Standards are average. Achievement is satisfactory for all students. They, and their teachers, are not satisfied with this and are working hard together to raise the bar and improve further. Staffing difficulties have slowed the rate of progress but the college is doing all it can to overcome them. Attitudes to learning are good. Students enjoy their work and all participate in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities provided for them. A small number of parents expressed concern about behaviour in lessons. The inspection found that, although there are a few students who have difficulty adjusting to the routines of college life, they are managed well and behaviour is good. Many students spoke about the absence of any form of bullying or intimidation in the college. The importance of healthy eating is understood and students play a full part in the school's sporting activities to stay fit. They willingly take on responsibilities, for example as sports leaders with younger children, and they are involved in many community activities to help others. They have the personal qualities to make the most of the next stage of their education. The technology college status has done much to raise students' awareness of the skills needed to secure their future economic well-being.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is now more good teaching than at the time of the previous inspection and some practice which is outstanding. There has been an improvement in the quality of lesson planning. Teachers are making better use of assessments to match learning activities to students' abilities, although time is not always given to checking and consolidating learning at the end of lessons. Instances were seen of excellent guidance to students on how to improve their work but such practice is not widespread. The curriculum is good and the specialist status has brought improvements in the use of computer technology for teaching and learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. School leaders and governors now make better use of performance data to evaluate what the school does well and the areas it still needs to work on. The headteacher must take credit for this clarity in thinking and for raising expectations. All who work in, and with the college are optimistic about its future and morale is high. Consequently, the college is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by improving the achievement of all students.
- Ensure that agreed policies on providing feedback to students and guiding them on how to improve their work are implemented consistently by all staff.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. In the 2006 national tests for fourteen year olds, the proportion of students achieving the expected level was average in English, mathematics and science. Results were an improvement on the previous year when standards had been significantly below average. Girls did better than boys, particularly in English. The college met its challenging performance targets in mathematics and science but not in English because of below average standards achieved by boys that year. However, the college's monitoring and assessment data shows that the proportion of Year 9 students now working at or above the levels expected nationally in Year 9 is greater than in 2006 with the standard of boys' English work now matching those in mathematics and in science.

GCSE results in 2006 were average with the proportion of students attaining five or more good GCSE passes improving for the second year running. Boys and girls achieve equally well but some students who had joined the college part way through Years 10 or 11 achieved below average. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made satisfactory progress. The school's challenging GCSE targets were met. Current evidence from the college's own data on Years 10 and 11 show standards to be average with students making satisfactory progress and achieving similarly to those of last year. The college's main priority for development is to improve the rate of progress for all students so that above average standards are attained.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. A small number of parents expressed concern about behaviour but inspection evidence found it to be good. The few instances of poor behaviour seen during the inspection were dealt with quickly and effectively. Fixed term exclusions are used infrequently. Students say that relationships are good and that they feel safe and secure because there is no bullying or intimidation. They enjoy college and attendance rates are average.

The college places great emphasis on students staying fit and well. They respond by eating nutritious meals at lunchtime and getting involved in sporting activities. The significant support for charity work and the good involvement of students in out-of-college activities show their sensitivity to the needs of others and students' commitment to the local community. Students know right from wrong and understand that they have responsibilities as well as rights. They articulate their views clearly and influence the college's development through the work of the student council. Students have the basic skills and personal qualities to make the most of the next stage of their education. Technology college status has improved students' understanding of how to prepare for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good and outstanding teaching seen. The positive climate for learning, which teachers and teaching support staff successfully foster throughout the college, makes an important contribution to students' learning. The college's new approach to planning lessons draws substantially upon national guidance and the use of

assessment to match work to the specific needs of students. This focuses teachers towards ensuring that information about students' attainments is carefully considered when choosing activities to ensure that they closely suit everyone's abilities. Students respond particularly well to practical tasks. They pay attention and work hard. Good questioning skills and effective use of interactive whiteboards help foster students' engagement in learning and progress.

Occasionally students are reticent when asked to contribute to class discussion but willingly talk about their work in close conversation with each other. On occasions, teachers' questioning misses the opportunity to judge the extent of learning that has taken place, or too little time is left for key points to be reinforced. Teachers and support staff work effectively in helping students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

Recent work to raise the quality of teaching includes ways to help students reflect on what they have learned, and to advise them on what to do next to improve. Students clearly enjoy the sense of accomplishment that comes from success and value the school's approach to rewarding their motivation and endeavour. Nevertheless, these approaches are not yet consistent throughout the school. Marking often includes congratulatory remarks, and awards recognise good work, but feedback is not yet consistently given to students in accordance with the school's policy.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Students benefit from a good curriculum. It offers a wide range of experience that promotes their academic and personal development through a well-designed programme of National Curriculum subjects, with opportunities to study two modern foreign languages. The school provides a good personal, social, health education and citizenship programme. All students follow a course of study in design and technology, which reflects the college's specialist technology status. High quality displays in corridors and foyers of students' work exemplify their work in technology and record their enjoyment of participation in educational outings, such as to a residential outdoor centre, visitors' contributions to art and music, and links with a school in Mexico. Students are fulsome in their praise for the wide range of after-school competitive sports available, in which they enthusiastically take part. Together, this richness of experience greatly enhances their physical, social and cultural development.

Outstanding links with schools, colleges and with the immediate community, help to adapt the curriculum to local circumstances. Partnerships with other small secondary schools, to form the 'rural academy', give gifted and talented students good opportunities to extend their knowledge, for example through astronomy and genetics master-classes. Local further education colleges offer 14–16 year old students accredited courses including one on land use which reflects the local farming industry. The Solway Young Rangers initiative for local environmental conservation, and training as Sports Leaders to assist with primary schools, further enhance personal development through the good opportunities students have to contribute to their community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The college's atmosphere is calm and purposeful. Procedures for child protection, health and safety and risk assessments are in place and reviewed regularly. Vetting procedures for staff working directly with students meet national guidelines. Teachers and their assistants show high levels of commitment to students' welfare and provide the personal support they require. There are good links with external agencies to give vulnerable

students the care they need. Students say they feel valued and that they are well supported by trusting relationships with adults. Careers advice and support are good and ensure that students are well informed about the options available to them for the next stage of their education and working life. The college has effective systems in place to monitor students' progress over time and to give additional help when weaknesses are uncovered.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The newly appointed headteacher provides good leadership and her determination has driven the recent rise in standards at Key Stage 3. She is well supported by the assistant headteacher and by committed teaching and support staff who work effectively as a team. The college's self-evaluation procedures have improved because of the better use of performance data and they are now good. The college recognises that not every leader is monitoring performance with sufficient rigour. All who work in the college are committed to equality of opportunity for every boy and girl, as is evident from their good personal development. Forward planning is done well and the priority to raise standards is the focus of the college's work. There are excellent links with partner institutions to broaden students' experience and understanding of the work done in the classroom. Governance is satisfactory. Governors know the college well and play a full part in evaluating performance and shaping its future direction. Recent staffing difficulties have slowed progress and the college is doing all it can to minimise the impact of staff absences. There is an appropriate range of good quality resources to support students' learning and they are used well to give good value for money. There have been good improvements since the previous inspection, particularly in raising standards at Key Stage 3. The college's capacity for further improvement is good.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	-----------------------

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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

18 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Solway Community Technology College, Cumbria, CA7 4DD

Thank you for the welcome you extended to us during our recent visit and the time many of you gave to talk to us about your college. You answered our questions very well and made a good contribution to the inspection. We enjoyed our short stay and only wished we had time to see more of the creative and sporting activities you are involved in.

You will know that when inspectors visited your college a year ago, they found that significant improvements were needed, particularly in improving standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 9. We are pleased to say that the school is now satisfactory with improvements that have been made because of your hard work and that of the teachers and their assistants. Many other improvements have also taken place, for example in formally recognising and rewarding good work, and in developing the links with other schools and the community to broaden your education.

We found a strong sense of community in your college and were impressed when many of you said that there is no bullying or intimidation. You have the personal qualities and basic skills to make a success of your education and to prepare you for future employment.

Standards are now average and your teachers want to work with you to make them even better. Consequently, the first area for development is to improve the rate of progress you make so that you can exceed your own and your teachers' expectations. We also think that there could be greater consistency in the way teachers implement routines to help you in your work. For example, in some lessons, you are not clear about what you must do to improve your work.

We wish you well with your studies and your plans for the future.

Yours sincerely

Brian Dower

Lead Inspector