

Seaham School of Technology

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114286
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	295390
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Honoree Gordon HMI

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	1084
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pauline Ramshaw
Headteacher	Mr David Shield
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2006
School address	Burnhall Drive Seaham County Durham SR7 0EN
Telephone number	0191 5161600
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Seaham school is a larger than average sized community school, with specialist technology status. It draws on a significantly deprived area and there are health concerns also for some families. The ability of students on entry to the school is a little below the national average, noticeably in English. Following the last inspection in 2006, the school was given a notice to improve. The school is due to have new premises in 2010 through the government's Building Schools for the Future initiative.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school no longer requires a notice to improve.

Seaham School of Technology has made good improvement since the last inspection in February 2006. The school provides satisfactory education and there are several good aspects to its work: the curriculum; the provision for students' personal development; the care, guidance and support for students and the quality of leadership and management. Standards have risen noticeably in Key Stage 4, so that by the end of the year 11 the more able students now reach slightly above national average results at GCSE. However, the proportion of students gaining good grades that include English and mathematics remains low compared to national figures. There have been signs of improvement, too, in results at the end of Key Stage 3, though the picture is complicated by the fact that some students take the examination earlier than usual. Overall, students make satisfactory progress, but progress is faster in years 10 and 11, than in years 7 to 9.

Much of the credit for this improvement goes to the headteacher and his team of senior and middle managers, who have decisively and enthusiastically driven forward new ideas and systems which benefit the students. There have been changes of personnel in key posts and additional staff brought in to help support students. As a result of all this hard effort, attendance has improved and is now at national average. This indicates clearly that a greater proportion of students enjoy their education than was previously the case.

The quality of teaching has improved, through close monitoring by the managers and through the good opportunities provided to the teachers to develop their teaching skills and to share good practice. Teachers plan and deliver lessons which interest the students, but further work remains to be done to gear the lessons up to meeting the full range of students' needs and to getting students really involved and excited about their own learning. The curriculum has been improved, to make school interesting and relevant and to really foster students' development as young people. For example, the range of vocational subjects has been further extended. More time has been given over to literacy and numeracy, and standards here have risen, but the proportion of students gaining good qualifications in these subjects by the time they leave school is still below national average.

Students generally enjoy school. Behaviour is satisfactory and many students show good attitudes to learning in class. Students comment that behaviour has got better: 'school is friendlier now' and that they feel safe in school. Parents are not yet convinced of this: many parents expressed their concerns about behaviour in the questionnaires. The behaviour of some students can indeed be challenging. Staff work hard on managing this and do not allow low-level disruption to prevent learning taking place. The school recognises it must continue its focus on promoting good behaviour. Regrettably, sometimes serious issues in the community spill over into school.

The care, guidance and support provided for the students are good. The pastoral system has been strengthened and the various agencies and links operate very effectively to assist students who find school difficult, or who have particular problems at home. The school has made giant strides forward recently and impact can be seen, but there is much yet to do to build on recent successes. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further in English, mathematics and science.
- Ensure that students make faster progress in Key Stage 3.
- Match lessons more closely to students' different abilities and interests, encouraging them to take more responsibility for their own learning.

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

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average. Achievement was adequate overall in summer 2006 in the national tests at age fourteen and in GCSE examinations. Standards are broadly average at Key Stage 3, though students made less progress in English, mathematics and science than might have been expected. Mathematics improved noticeably compared with previous years. During Key Stage 4, students made good progress in many subjects. Progress is better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. Younger students have to overcome weaknesses in basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, so improvement is sometimes slow to get going.

Students' average points score in the 2006 end-of-Key Stage 3 tests improved at about the same rate as in other schools but remained below the national average. In Key Stage 4, standards in some subjects were much higher than in others. Optional subjects, including vocational choices, made a significant contribution to the improving trend in results. However, the proportion of students who gained five or more good grade passes including English and mathematics was low.

Work in the students' books confirms that progress is satisfactory and that standards are slowly rising, although this varies across subjects. Standards in the lessons inspectors observed were satisfactory. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are good and serve students well in other subjects.

There is no significant variation in the achievement of different groups of students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well by a range of appropriate strategies within and outside classrooms. Some students for whom the school had provided additional help made less progress than others because they were enrolled on alternative Key Stage 4 courses. This limited their opportunities to take public examinations. This situation has been resolved for the 2007 examinations.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school makes good provision for students' personal development and for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, though the spiritual aspect is comparatively weaker. Some students' personal lives and difficulties within the local community pose particular challenges for the school. Students say that they feel safe and well cared for in school, even when there have been serious incidents. For many students, school provides stability and opportunities to develop confidence and self-esteem. This encourages positive attitudes to learning. Whilst sometimes low-level disruption by a minority of students holds up lessons, students report that this is not frequent and that behaviour is much improved. Inspectors agree.

Considerable time is devoted to students' moral and social education through the personal, social and health education programme and the tutorial time. This enables students to reflect on aspects of their lives and the importance of forming good relationships with others. A new pastoral system, with form groups of different ages together, is further promoting a calm atmosphere, appropriate for learning.

There have been several, well-coordinated initiatives which have led to a rise in attendance. The subjects on offer at school and the enrichment activities interest the students and are relevant to their future lives. These, together with the good teacher–pupil relationships, have resulted in more students now enjoying school. Students are happy that their views are being listened to: weekly whole-school interactive question time with the headteacher shows them that their views matter. There is good encouragement to get involved in contributing to school and community life. One example is through technology-based projects with primary schools, which help to develop students' economic understanding, through the process of costing and planning. Students have a growing awareness of how to keep themselves healthy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, and this represents improvement since the last inspection. An effective training programme is continuing apace, focused on raising standards. Teachers use digital media confidently in the classroom and students say that this brings lessons to life. Relationships between staff and students are very positive.

There are good lessons which are lively, with a good range of activities keeping students active and engaged. However, some lessons fail to fully capture and retain the interest of students or to provide sufficiently well for those of different abilities. The school recognises the need, especially at Key Stage 3, to improve the way teachers use information about how individual students are progressing when they plan lessons. As yet, the work in lessons is not geared closely enough to match students' abilities and so ensure a faster rate of progress. The needs of students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well understood; these students are well supported by teachers and classroom assistants and make the same progress as their classmates.

Students are set personal subject targets and some subjects mark work regularly against clear criteria. In the best examples, marking refers directly to levels of achievement and students are given guidance on how to improve. However, the use of targets is not consistent across the curriculum and marking does not always show how to improve work. The frequency of homework varies, with differences between groups as to what is set.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good, well-balanced and appropriately emphasises the school's technology specialism. The curriculum has been extended to better reflect students' needs. For example, there is increased time for literacy and numeracy in Year 7, and extended vocational education in Key Stage 4, including qualifications in catering, child care and construction. In addition to GCSE courses, students can achieve alternative accreditation in a number of areas. These developments have been supported by effective collaboration with other educational institutions

and providers. In Key Stage 3, higher-attaining students can undertake accelerated courses in a number of subjects and can study leisure and tourism. In Key Stage 4, additional time has been allocated to provide a wider range of choice in English and performing arts, as well as enabling students to follow interests in other subject areas. There is good provision for ICT, including a new i-media GCSE course. Students and staff use ICT well in many other subjects. There is a good range of enrichment activities and educational visits. These do much to foster students' personal development. Inspectors saw Year 10 students participating enthusiastically in Enterprise Day activities organised by the local Education Business Partnership. The personal, social and health education programme, which includes careers, education about sex and relationships and drug education, helps to prepare students as socially aware and responsible young adults. Provision for citizenship education has been improved. Students have a clear understanding of their education options after the age of 16.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

An extensive range of good quality care underpins the school's obvious concern to meet the needs of all students, including helping to promote their emotional well-being and mental health. Students have access to a variety of adults who can listen to problems and put in hand an appropriate response, both in school and through on-site confidential services offered by other agencies, such as the Primary Care Trust. Interviews with students and surveys suggest that poor behaviour and bullying is a reducing problem and that there are suitable response systems and structures, which are appreciated by the students. Students trained as peer leaders are highly regarded by those whom they counsel.

The range of provision within the inclusion area is a good example of the school's wish to safeguard the majority of learners. The school aims to help disaffected or disruptive students to develop a sense of self-worth and to resume their studies within the main school. Current requirements for safeguarding children are in place and staff are regularly trained and updated in child protection procedures.

Students are increasingly helped to understand the quality of their work and how they might improve it through the growing use of target-setting and systems that update information about progress. Timely interventions take place to help students who may be falling behind in their work. Students are advised effectively at key moments such as when joining the school, choosing optional subjects and progressing into further education, training or employment. Whilst much advice and guidance is provided by school staff, very close and productive relationships with outside agencies contribute greatly to these successful programmes. Strategies to increase parental involvement in the school include the development of academic review days, as well as formal parents' evenings.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good and leaders demonstrate good capacity to improve the school further. The headteacher has a clear vision to provide the best possible education for all, which is shared by the school community. He has engendered a strong spirit of team-work across all the staff, empowering them to make the necessary improvements and so successfully implementing the changes he has sought. He is particularly well supported in this by a committed

and able senior management team. Middle managers are enthusiastic and their well-targeted professional development programme has supported them in improving teaching and learning, resulting in the rise in standards.

Extensive links with outside agencies and with the local authority support the school well in addressing the issues identified in the last inspection. Additional resources have been used effectively to help raise standards. Governors hold the school well to account. They are well-informed and they provide effective support on priorities and actions. Through specialist technology status, the school has benefited from additional resources, such as ICT equipment, and this is contributing to students' achievement.

Strategic planning to take the school forward is good. Processes for self-evaluation are strong, and take account of the views of governors, staff and students. The school accurately identifies its strengths and weaknesses and appropriate actions to address these are embedded in its development plan. Issues identified in the previous inspection are being tackled effectively and impact can be seen, although not all the targets the school has set itself have been met. Specific strategies, such as the rewards system, have resulted in improvements in attendance and in behaviour. There have been some improvements to the fabric of the buildings, but the school remains cramped for its numbers.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
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	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	3

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

21 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Seaham School of Technology, County Durham, SR7 0EN

I am writing to thank you for your help during the recent inspection of your school and to let you know what the findings of the inspection team were.

We think that your school has made good improvement since its last inspection in 2006 and so it no longer needs to be in a special category for extra support. The quality of education overall is satisfactory, and there are several good aspects.

The school has good capacity to improve further.

- Your achievement and standards have improved, especially at Key Stage 4, and are now satisfactory.
- You are making satisfactory progress.
- Your lessons are better. The teaching and learning are now satisfactory. We saw some good lessons.
- The curriculum is good, with a good balance of academic and vocational subjects.
- Your personal development is good.
- The staff care, guide and support you well.
- Leadership and management of the school are good.
- Your behaviour is satisfactory; many of you have good attitudes in class.

This is a very positive picture and represents a lot of hard work on everyone's part, staff and students, so well done! Many of you talked about the important role your headteacher has played in driving forward these improvements.

You told us that you were pleased to see that something had been done about the buildings and you felt also that behaviour had got better and that school was a friendlier place. Even when there was recently some trouble in school you said that the headteacher and staff looked after you and you felt safe. It is a pity that things in the community sometimes spill over into school like that, because we can see that generally you enjoy school. You told us that the rewards system was a good thing.

Many of your parents wrote of their concerns about behaviour in the questionnaires, so they will need some reassurance. A few students need to think more about how they behave in school, but you said that it is only a minority of lessons that get disrupted and we know that the teachers are going to keep working hard on managing behaviour. You all need to support the teachers in this.

You have come a long way in the last year and we think that you can continue to improve, so we have asked the headteacher to look now at the following.

- Raise standards further in English, mathematics and science.
- Ensure that you make faster progress in Key Stage 3.

- Match lessons more closely to the different abilities and interests you have and encourage you to take more responsibility for your own learning.

With good wishes for the future,

Yours sincerely

Honore e Gordon

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B