

# Washington School: A DfES Technology College

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	108865
<b>Local Authority</b>	Sunderland
<b>Inspection number</b>	301363
<b>Inspection dates</b>	6–7 June 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Christine Graham HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1060
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Dorothy Butler
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Michael O'Brien
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 March 2003
<b>School address</b>	Spout Lane Washington Tyne and Wear NE37 2AA
<b>Telephone number</b>	0191 2193845
<b>Fax number</b>	0191 2193848

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Washington School is a larger than average specialist technology college. Some students have joined the school in Year 10 because a nearby school is closing. Very few students speak English as an additional language and nearly all are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very high, but the proportion of students with a statement of educational need is only slightly above average. The school has a 20 place unit for students with learning difficulties. Some students suffer social and economic disadvantage. A new headteacher was appointed in June 2006. The school has many external awards and accreditations including Investors in People.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Washington School provides students with a satisfactory education. The school has been through a period of uncertainty which has had a negative impact on the outcomes of its work. However, matters are now much improved and the future of the school is secure. Robust action has been taken to tackle areas of weakness and to consolidate existing strengths and there is evidence to show that this is having the desired effect.

When students join the school their attainment is broadly in line with that seen nationally. In recent years many have not made the progress they should have done in Key Stage 3. Few students reach the higher levels in English and science by the end of the key stage, although their attainment in mathematics has improved significantly in recent years and in 2006 more students reached the highest level than did so nationally. Students make better progress in Key Stage 4, although standards are below the national average. However, there was a significant decline in the number of students attaining higher grades at GCSE or equivalent qualifications in some subjects in 2006. Evidence seen during the inspection indicates that matters have improved. All students now make at least satisfactory progress and are on track to reach the more challenging targets which have been set for them. Students with learning difficulties achieve at least as well as other students because of the good support they receive. Although the specialism is effectively led and managed it is not yet having sufficient impact on improving student progress.

Students are now tracked effectively so that extra support can be provided and underachievement identified at an early stage. English is the weakest of the core subjects on entry to the school and some students need extra support with the basic skills of reading and writing. A literacy co-ordinator has been appointed and a programme of targeted intervention designed to improve basic literacy skills is now in place in some year groups and will be provided for all students next year. This is much needed because weaknesses in English are having a negative impact on other subjects and not all staff pay sufficient attention to improving basic skills. Students in the curriculum access unit receive effective teaching and support, but this is not always maintained when they are taught in mainstream classes. The school and its feeder primary schools have established a very useful partnership which allows them to share good practice, promote effective learning and improve transition. As a result mathematics and modern foreign languages have benefited from a well planned programme of training designed to help students learn more effectively. This is making a positive and much needed contribution to the improvement process.

The curriculum is good, as is care guidance and support. However, these are not yet having the desired impact on student progress because students do not develop effective learning habits and there are inconsistencies between departments and lessons. Teaching is broadly satisfactory. Teachers have benefited from accurate guidance on how to improve their work. However, some weaknesses remain. There is an over reliance on worksheets in some subjects and work is not always matched closely enough to individual need. Teachers' talk dominates some lessons and there is too little time for students to develop new skills or understanding. Teaching is secure, but sometimes a little dull and as a result students are not always excited by or fully involved in learning. Marking does not always tell students what must be improved and how to do it. Some parents and students expressed concerns about behaviour. However, the school has a range of systems in place to manage behaviour and behaviour seen during the inspection was

good. Attendance is stable, but has been slow to improve despite the best efforts of the school. It remains below average.

Although not all students choose to eat a healthy diet most know what they should eat and why. The school garden produces a nutritious array of salad vegetables and herbs which are used by the kitchen to make healthy options at lunchtime. Students benefit from PE lessons and extra-curricular activities and the school is doing all it can to increase the participation of girls. Students are given good guidance on post-16 choices. There are good opportunities for work-based learning and vocational training. The school looks after students very well and procedures to keep them safe are in place. Overall students' personal development and well-being is satisfactory.

The headteacher has a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and is working effectively with the experienced senior leadership team and middle managers to ensure that weaknesses are tackled and good practice consolidated and built upon. Senior leaders provide effective coaching and support for middle managers and there are effective systems to allow good practice to be shared. Although it is early days, it is evident that the decline in the school's fortunes has been arrested and the school has a secure platform from which to make further improvement.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards and improve the progress made by students in English and science
- provide a greater variety of teaching and learning tasks and a better balance of teacher talk and student activity
- Ensure that marking tells students what must be improved and how to do it

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, although standards are below average, work seen during the inspection shows that improvements are being made. In recent years students have not progressed well enough in Key Stage 3. Students make better progress in Key Stage 4. However, the proportion of students gaining five A\* to C grades at GCSE fell dramatically in 2006, especially when compared to much improved results gained in 2005. Students did well in art, business studies, mathematics, modern foreign languages and music, but achieved lower standards than they should have done in drama, history, geography, information and communication technology (ICT) and design technology. However, matters are improving. There are robust systems in place to track individual progress and identify underachievement. This information is used effectively to group students and plan support, but individual teachers do not always use it well enough on a day-to-day basis. The school recognises that some students have been entered for too many examinations in the past and has sensibly decided to rationalise the number of entries. All students including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities now make at least satisfactory progress. The specialism does not yet contribute well enough to raising achievement, but the school is aware of this and has measures in place to bring about improvement.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 3

Student's personal development and well-being are satisfactory with some strengths. Behaviour is good overall. Students are polite and friendly. They are happy to talk to adults and are very courteous, for instance holding doors open and apologising on the rare occasions they forget to do so. No offensive or aggressive language was heard during the inspection. Year 11 students commented that they are happy to remain in school during the examination period because they like being there and value the extra support they are given. However, in a very small number of lessons, where teaching is weaker, behaviour is less good. The school has many strategies in place to deal with inappropriate behaviour and the number of fixed-term exclusions has declined significantly this year. However, despite the best efforts of the school attendance is below the national average although a small improvement can be seen from term-to-term. Most students enjoy school and many participate in out of school activities. Students say they feel safe and that the few incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively. Students take on responsibility by serving on the school council, organising and supporting school events and fundraising for charities. They develop spiritual awareness in lessons and through links with local churches and they are encouraged to be reflective. They understand different cultures, but the school is aware that they are not prepared well enough for life in multicultural Britain. Students are well equipped for their future lives. However, the impact of the good curriculum provision is somewhat reduced because basic literacy and ICT skills are less well developed and some students lack independent learning and organisational skills.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons thoroughly ensuring that students achieve the desired objective. Staff have responded well to the guidance they have been given and the practice of most is improving. However, many students are very passive and few benefit as well as they might from the good curriculum on offer because teacher talk dominates many lessons. Opportunities are missed to develop independent or organisational skills or to fully enthuse and motivate students.

Some students are aware that they struggle with basic grammar, spelling or punctuation and welcome any help they are given, but literacy is not yet promoted in all lessons. Marking is inconsistent across classes and subjects. Most books are marked regularly and effort is acknowledged. However, although students are given guidance on how to move from one level to the next they are not told exactly what they need to improve and how to do it.

In the very best lessons the pace is brisk and short teacher explanations are skilfully combined with a series of interesting and varied practical activities. Teachers are involved with students for the entire lesson ensuring that the more able are challenged and those who need extra help are well supported. Students are encouraged to evaluate their own learning using helpful symbols and this is taken a step further when they are asked to explain their judgements. When photocopied materials are used, they are short and designed to consolidate a particular skill. In these lessons teachers are aware of the ways in which students learn and they provide students with many opportunities to work in pairs and groups, feeding back their opinions to

the whole class. Students thrive during such lessons and their behaviour is exemplary. They achieve well and thoroughly enjoy learning.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is good. It is considerably enriched by sporting and creative activities and a life skills programme that incorporates the teaching of personal, social and health education, and citizenship. There are interesting opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those who are less motivated by traditional subjects or qualifications. There is a good range of vocational and academic subjects on offer and the school works well with local businesses to provide workplace learning and vocational training. The school evaluates curriculum provision rigorously and takes prompt action where needed. For instance a new ICT course has been introduced which is better matched to the needs and interests of students. Some students have extra English lessons in order to improve their literacy skills and there is a good range of additional activities on offer.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The quality of care, guidance and support in the school is good; it is a strength of the school. Care for students drives this school and processes to identify individual needs and overcome barriers to learning are sophisticated and well used. Students are very well supported and there is much useful and interesting work taking place in order to increase the motivation of some who are harder to reach. Measures to keep students safe are in place and, despite its rather tired appearance, the site is well maintained. The school supports students well, particularly vulnerable students, using a wide range of outside professionals as well as its own staff. Students receive good guidance which effectively supports them to make choices and decisions. Students and parents are supported in decisions about subject choices and appropriate pathways at Key Stage 4 by the very detailed profiles of each student which are compiled. These reflect their interests, strengths and the skills which they have already acquired and help families to make the right choices. Academic tracking is developing and challenging targets are set, however, not enough staff ensure that students use their planners, effectively, to support learning.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders are very experienced and know the school well. They steered the school through a period of uncertainty and have adapted well to recent changes, including some reorganisation of responsibilities. The recently appointed headteacher has a clear view of both the strengths and weaknesses of the school. While recognising all that is good from the past, he nevertheless has a clear sense of purpose and high expectations for future progress. The leadership team have an accurate view of the school. A regular and thorough system of self-evaluation is in place, expectations are made clear and all senior and middle leaders are involved in school self-evaluation. There is a system of coaching and professional development and teachers are given accurate feedback about their work so that they can improve, whatever their starting point. In a short period of time the school has tackled the most urgent issues and has embarked on a process of review and improvement. Plans made to improve the school are well targeted and appropriately matched to current and future needs.

The school has benefited from the very good support and challenge provided by the school improvement partner and from the local authority. Governors are very supportive of the school and are developing a secure understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The school provides satisfactory value for money and capacity for further improvement is good.



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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</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>	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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	4
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	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
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	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**

8 June 2007

Dear students

Inspection of Washington School: A DfES Technology College, Tyne and Wear, NE37 2AA

Thank you for being so welcoming during the inspection. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you work. We thought your behaviour was good and that you were polite and very helpful. We think there are many good things about your school. We were impressed by the good curriculum which is on offer and the good care, support and guidance you receive. We thought your teachers work hard and that they know a lot about their subjects. They want you to work hard in lessons because in the past some students have not made as much progress as they should have done. However, some of your teachers talk to you for too long and do not give you enough time to find things out for yourselves or to share your ideas with others. This is not a very exciting way to learn and if you have two or three lessons of this kind in a day you become bored and do not enjoy school as much as you could. When we asked you which lessons you most enjoy, you identified subjects in which we had seen exciting teaching which kept you interested and well motivated. We have asked Mr O'Brien and the leadership team to make sure that all your lessons are as interesting as the ones you enjoy most.

We know that some of you have experienced many changes in the past few years. Mr O'Brien and the staff know that change is difficult and they are trying to help you make the most of school and achieve well. We have asked them to make sure that you achieve well in every subject and to ensure that when your work is marked you are told exactly how to improve. However, you also have a part to play. Although many of you do attend school regularly attendance is not good enough. You will not benefit from interesting and exciting lessons if you are not in school to enjoy them. We also noticed that many of you do not have your planners in school or do not use them effectively. In order to learn well you have to be well organised and well prepared.

Enjoy the remainder of the summer term.

Best wishes

Christine Graham HMI