

Southfield Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112394
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	310880
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Garry Jones 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	601
Sixth form	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Gordon McCullough
Headteacher	Mrs Lynda Dalkin
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Moorclose Road Workington Cumbria CA14 5BH
Telephone number	01900 325260
Fax number	01900 325263

Age group	11–19
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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

This is a smaller than average school which serves the town of Workington and the surrounding rural areas. It works with a neighbouring school to manage and staff a joint sixth form centre. The school serves an area with pockets of considerable social and economic deprivation. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. Almost all students are of White British origin and there are very few students from other ethnic groups. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above that found nationally, but the number with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average. The school is a specialist college for technology and holds the Artsmark and Healthy School awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The quality of education provided is satisfactory. The school provides a caring environment reflecting a strong commitment to inclusion. The large majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire value highly the contribution the school makes to the development of their children.

The pastoral care of the students is good. There are strong systems in place to provide support for individuals and to ensure that the most vulnerable students are able to benefit fully from their education. The school has well established links with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that all students receive high quality care and support. The personal development and well-being of the students are satisfactory. The majority of students are responsible and behave well as the school has worked hard to improve behaviour. Although a few parents raised concerns about behaviour, the school has effective systems in place to deal quickly with inappropriate behaviour by a small minority of students. The success of this work is evident in the low levels of exclusion. The majority of students attend school regularly, but a small number of poor attendees are, despite the rigorous actions of the school, keeping the attendance figure below average. Students contribute to the development of the school through the school council and to the wider community through charity fund-raising, sporting events and productions. There are also established international links to schools in France and Germany.

Students enter the school with standards of attainment that are well below average. They make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 3, but standards at the end of Year 9 remain below average. In 2007, faced with exceptionally low results in mathematics and science and inadequate progress in Key Stage 3, the school acted promptly to address this situation. Inspection evidence shows that standards have risen and that students are now achieving in line with expectations. This was despite a prolonged period of staffing difficulties in mathematics. Students continue to make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 4, but standards remain below average. Standards are very low in mathematics and in the number of students gaining at least five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. However, the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades has risen in 2008. It was already close to the national average in 2007. The school met its specialist college targets at GCSE for technology and science in 2008, but not for mathematics.

The achievement of students is satisfactory and this reflects teaching that is satisfactory overall. While there is some good teaching, too much teaching that is merely satisfactory prevents students from making good progress. All students have targets for each subject and in the best lessons teachers ensure that students have clear advice on how to improve. However, the use of assessment data and targets to inform teachers' planning and to ensure that all students receive appropriate levels of challenge and good advice is inconsistent. The curriculum is satisfactory. It meets the needs of students well through a range of pathways in Key Stage 4, including vocational courses which have been enhanced by the Technology College status. However, the provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are yet to have sufficient impact on raising standards.

The leadership and management of the school are strongly committed to inclusion and improvement. Over the last year, the senior leadership has been strengthened and there have been recent appointments to lead key departments. The school has a clear plan for school improvement, and standards are rising, but the systematic monitoring of the impact of initiatives

is not sufficiently embedded at all levels. The process of self-evaluation at whole school level is satisfactory and identifies accurately strengths and areas for development. However, the role of middle managers in monitoring teaching and achievement is inconsistent and does not contribute sufficiently to raising standards. Targets have not been used with sufficient consistency to drive up standards fast enough in all subjects. The governing body of the school are well aware of its strengths and priorities for improvement and are committed to its development.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory, but the leadership of the new head of sixth form is beginning to bring about improvement. The curriculum is now good with an improved range of courses, including vocational programmes, which meet the needs of students well. Students enjoy their time in the sixth form and attend regularly. They are well supported and cared for through an effective tutorial system. An improved system of target setting and monitoring of the progress of students has been introduced. This, together with the additional support and challenge provided for students at risk of underachieving, has brought about improvements in achievement. Although standards are well below average, students' achievement is satisfactory overall, reflecting the low standards on entry. Despite this, the proportion of students proceeding to higher education is rising. The teaching is satisfactory overall, but students are not encouraged sufficiently to develop the skills of independent learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the attainment of students, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Improve the overall quality of teaching by sharing the best practice within the school.
- Improve the use of assessment data to inform teaching and ensure all students have clear guidance on how to reach their targets.
- Improve the effectiveness of monitoring in all departments and identify those strategies that are most effective in raising standards of attainment.

A small proportion of 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

Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are well below the national average. In 2007, the results at the end of Key Stage 3 were well below average and exceptionally low in mathematics and science. This represented inadequate progress for this year group due to the poor progress students made in mathematics and science. Students made satisfactory progress in English. In 2008, the unvalidated Year 9 test results in mathematics and science, together with the school assessment records, show that results have improved, although they remain below average. Progress is now satisfactory and the vast majority of students are meeting appropriate targets.

In 2007, the results at the end of Key Stage 4 were well below average. The number of students gaining at least five A* to C grades at GCSE was just below the national figure, but with the measure including English and mathematics, the proportion fell to 28% which was significantly

below average. The standards in English and mathematics were very low. Despite this, the progress these students made when measured against their starting points, was satisfactory. The results in 2008 show further improvement in the proportion of students gaining at least five A* to C grades overall, but the proportion gaining this measure including English and mathematics, remains low. Standards in mathematics remain low. This reflects the considerable staffing instability over the last few years, which has now been addressed. However, external predictors of performance show that these students have made the expected progress. Overall achievement is satisfactory. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making progress in line with their peers.

Standards overall are exceptionally low due to the low standards in mathematics in both key stages together with the low proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C that include English and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory, but their spiritual and cultural development is less well developed than their social skills. Students feel safe in school and report that any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Behaviour around the school and within lessons is good. Students cooperate well with each other in lessons and show respect for peers and adults. Inappropriate behaviour by a minority of students is dealt with quickly and effectively and the number of fixed and permanent exclusions is low. Attendance is improving due to the wide range of appropriate strategies used, but remains below average. When lessons are challenging students clearly enjoy their education, but in many lessons they show too little enthusiasm for learning. Students are developing an awareness of healthy living, but not all of them put their knowledge into practice. The contribution to the wider community is good. There is a good range of opportunities for students to participate, for example, older students visit primary schools to prepare younger pupils for the move to the high school and also work with primary school students when they visit the school study centre in Eskdale. The school council is well developed and has contributed well to the development of the school environment through the use of their budget. Students are making satisfactory progress in developing skills to prepare them for their future lives including through work experience and vocational courses.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The relationships between teachers and students are good. In all key stages, some teaching is good with teachers using their good subject knowledge effectively to challenge students. This good teaching is characterised by a brisk pace, clear explanations and activities that engage students in their learning. Questioning is used well to search out students' understanding and to challenge any misconceptions. There are too many satisfactory lessons to ensure that students consistently make good progress. In less effective lessons teachers control the activities too closely and this limits students' involvement. In these situations, students become passive and their rate of progress slows. A small number of inadequate lessons were seen when students did not make sufficient progress as the tasks did not always provide appropriate challenge. As a result, students do not

concentrate fully on their work. When students are given the opportunity to assess their own work and that of their peers, they respond well. However, these opportunities are not made available in all lessons. The use of assessment data to inform planning is inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. A good range of courses is available at Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of all students. Technology College status has been used to increase the range of technology and vocational courses. Good links with local industry, 'Creative Partnerships' and the National Health Service are used to enhance the curriculum for students and to reflect local needs. Vocational and work-related courses prepare students well for the next phase of education or employment with training. Those not taking vocational courses have provision for enterprise education through a specific lesson.

In Key Stage 3, the curriculum meets statutory requirements. Citizenship is taught effectively to all students in the school through a citizenship and religious education course and enterprise education is delivered through planned days. However, the provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT is yet to have sufficient impact on raising standards in these core skills. Programmes of lunchtime and after-school clubs are well attended. A good example is 'Rock Challenge' which involves large numbers of students working together to develop a drama production for local and regional presentation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The provision for care is good as staff create an environment where students feel safe and are encouraged to achieve. This is enhanced by effective links with a range of external agencies to ensure a particularly good level of care and pastoral support for the most vulnerable students. This is supported by the lead the school has taken in the establishment of a local delivery system for multi-agency working. Students at risk are identified early and support is quickly given. For example, teaching assistants effectively help students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make progress in lessons. Students report that they know where to seek help if they need it. There is effective support for students on entry to the school and when making choices at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. Safeguarding complies with statutory requirements.

Academic guidance is less well developed. Students have targets for all subjects and their progress is monitored regularly. This leads to intervention by pastoral staff and by heads of subject departments when students are underachieving. The use of data to monitor progress within departments is developing. Some students are aware of their targets and are given clear advice on how to improve but this is not yet consistent across all subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The established headteacher is determined to raise the attainment of students and is working hard to bring this about. The recently extended senior management team share her commitment to improving outcomes for all students. There is very strong partnership working with local schools and other agencies

including the police and fire service to support the development of students. The school has a clear plan for school improvement and standards are rising, but the systematic monitoring of the impact of initiatives is not embedded at all levels. The use of pupil targets is established, but these are not being used with sufficient consistency to drive up standards quickly enough in all subjects. The process of self-evaluation is satisfactory and identifies accurately the strengths and areas for development. The role of middle managers is developing, but the rigour with which they monitor teaching and achievement to bring about improvement is inconsistent. The governing body are aware of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Their role in contributing to the strategic development of the school and in challenging the senior leaders to improve is developing. The school has satisfactory capacity to bring about further improvement because action taken has brought about improvements in achievement and in attendance, but they have not had sufficient time to become fully embedded. New subject leaders for mathematics, science and technology have not been in post for sufficiently long to for their actions to have had an impact. The school currently provides satisfactory value for money.

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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	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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	3	

The quality of provision

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

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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Dear Students

Inspection of Southfield Technology College, Cumbria, CA14 5BH

You may remember that I and some colleagues recently inspected your school. I would like to thank you for the polite welcome that you gave us. We valued the opportunities to talk to you about your work and to listen to your views on the school. We found that your school provides you with a satisfactory quality of education.

You make satisfactory progress in your studies. However, the overall standards you achieve in the tests at the end of Key Stage 3 are below average. By the time you leave the school at sixteen or move into the sixth form the majority of you have achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C which is similar to the position in other schools. However, too few of you have gained the same grades in English and mathematics. The teaching in the school is satisfactory overall, but there is also some good teaching and in those lessons you make good progress. The range of subjects you have to study at Key Stage 4 meets your needs well.

Staff look after you well and we were particularly impressed by the support and advice they provide for those of you who have the greatest difficulties in coping with school. They help you all to develop and we were impressed by your good behaviour and how you ensure that the school is a safe place. Although attendance is improving we found that some of you do not attend school regularly enough which prevents you from doing as well as you could.

The headteacher and the senior team are working hard to improve the college. They know the strengths of the school and the areas that need improving. We have asked them to help you to achieve higher standards particularly in English and mathematics. We have suggested that all staff continue to work together to make all of your lessons as good as the very best. We have also asked the school to make more use of the information they collect on your progress to plan your next lessons and to give you clear advice on how to improve your work. Finally we have asked them to look carefully at how well each department is doing so that they can identify what most helps you to improve.

You can help the school to improve by attending regularly, telling your teachers how you like to learn and continuing to behave well. Good luck for the future.

Garry Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector