

Dene Community School of Technology

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114313
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	311561
Inspection dates	6–7 December 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	738
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Hardy
Headteacher	Mrs Joan L Lowe
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2004
School address	Manor Way Peterlee County Durham SR8 5RL
Telephone number	0191 5862140
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Dene Community School is slightly smaller than the average sized comprehensive school. It serves an area with a high incidence of social and economic deprivation. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above average, as is the percentage with learning difficulties. The student population is predominantly White British. Attainment on entry to Year 7 is below average. The school has 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

Dene Community School of Technology provides a satisfactory standard of education. Parents are supportive of the school and in some years it is oversubscribed. Standards are below average overall but GCSE results improved this year and performance in mathematics and science exceeded targets. The progress students make and their achievement in relation to their starting points are satisfactory. The 2007 results in English were well below average at Key Stage 3 but school assessments and the work seen in lessons show that progress is now satisfactory in the subject.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. They enjoy school and many avail themselves of the additional after school classes to improve their examination prospects. The extra-curricular activities are popular and extend students' enjoyment and understanding of the work done in lessons. The behaviour of most students is good but they lack the self-confidence to be more independent and self-reliant in their learning. The behaviour of a small number of students is unsatisfactory at times, but they are well managed because of the effective systems in place to support them in adjusting to school routines. There is effective provision for vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and as a result their progress and achievement, as reflected in the 2007 national tests and examinations, were good. Attendance rates have risen over the last two years but remain below average. The school is doing all it can to improve them. Students say that they feel safe and secure in school and that bullying is not a problem. Their views are taken note of and they have influenced developments in sports provision and lunchtime arrangements. They assist as sports coaches with primary school pupils and raise funds for those less fortunate than themselves. They have satisfactory basic skills and the personal qualities to be successful but they lack the confidence to be self-reliant and take risks in their learning.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the good lessons seen, learning activities were varied and demanding and, as a result, progress was good. In many lessons, however, students are not challenged to think for themselves, particularly the more able, and solutions to problems are too readily available on worksheets or in textbooks. There have been significant improvements in the use of assessment information to guide students on how well they are doing and what they must do to improve. The school makes good curriculum provision for its students, also a significant improvement since the previous inspection. They are therefore well prepared for the next stage in their lives, resulting in a marked increase in the number of students who progress to further education, training or employment. The care and support afforded to vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. The school has effective systems in place to monitor students' progress as they move through the school and to intervene quickly when weaknesses are uncovered.

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. The headteacher provides strong leadership and her vision has been the driving force behind the recent rise in standards. She is well supported by the chair of governors who works hard on the school's behalf in the community. There have been improvements in the quality of leadership at head of department level, particularly in the use of assessments to monitor and evaluate students' performance and raise their attainment. Issues concerning the leadership roles of some of the senior team, identified at the previous inspection, remain unresolved. Consequently, some senior leaders are not sufficiently involved in driving forward standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure students are able to write fluently and accurately in order to raise standards in English.
- Extend opportunities for students to think for themselves, study independently and take risks in their learning.
- Ensure that challenging learning activities are planned for the most able.
- Ensure all staff with management responsibilities play a full part in leading and implementing initiatives aimed at raising standards.

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 below average. There has been an improving trend over the last three years in the proportion of students attaining 5+ A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. The school met its statutory targets in 2007 and results that year were below average, an improvement on the well below average standards of recent years. Students' achievement, in terms of the progress they made in relation to their attainment on entry to the school, was satisfactory overall. Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made similar progress. Achievement was satisfactory in English, where girls did significantly better than boys. Achievement was good in mathematics.

Results in the 2007 national tests at the end of Year 9 were below average overall. The school exceeded its information and communication technology target and its statutory targets in science and mathematics, where standards were average. Results in English were well below average and the statutory target was missed. Achievement in science and mathematics was good. It was unsatisfactory in English because of weaknesses in students' writing.

The school's assessment and tracking records and the work seen in lessons show that students currently in the school are making good progress in mathematics and science. They also show that progress has improved to a satisfactory level in English at Key Stage 3.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. They understand how to stay fit and well and they eat healthily and take part in a range of sporting activities. Students know right from wrong. Behaviour is satisfactory. Most conduct themselves responsibly in class and around school and they are keen to learn. They enjoy school and participation is high in after school classes for examination students and in extra-curricular activities, including trips away. There are a few students who have difficulty adjusting to school routines but their behaviour is managed well. Students say they feel safe and get on well together and that the occasional instances of bullying are dealt with promptly and effectively. The school has appropriate strategies in place to improve attendance rates. These have got better over the last three years but remain below average. Students are involved in a range of community activities, including sports coaching for primary pupils and fund raising. The active school council has been successful in securing improvements in physical education resources and in the organisation of the lunch break.

Students have satisfactory basic skills and many personal qualities to make the most of the next stage of their education and be successful in work, although they lack the confidence to be self-reliant and take risks.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Where lessons are good or better students are engaged, enthusiastic and challenged by the high expectations teachers have of them. In the best lessons, students experience a variety of learning strategies which motivates them and helps them to learn. This is made possible by the good relationships these teachers have with their students. Even in some of these good lessons, however, more able students are not stretched sufficiently because the learning activities are not always challenging enough. Assessment information to inform teaching is now being used effectively in classrooms to aid learning. Students are clear about their learning targets and know what they need to do to improve.

There are, however, too many inconsistencies in the quality of teaching which impacts on learning. In many of the lessons seen, students were not encouraged to think or learn independently and too much reliance was placed on teacher led activities. In these lessons, homework was not used to extend the learning done in class and there was an over reliance on worksheets and text books. Although attitudes to study are generally good, students in satisfactory lessons are often passive and happy to let the teacher do all the work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. There has been a significant improvement in the breadth and relevance of the curriculum since the last inspection. This has led to an increase in the numbers of school leavers progressing into further education, employment or training in 2007. The full impact of the work has yet to be seen on examination results. Students in Years 10 and 11 can choose from a range of academic and vocational subjects to study. This range is being expanded. All students follow a course of study in a technology subject, as befits the school's specialist status. The ambitions and aspirations of students are increasingly well catered for, from those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to those with talents and gifts. For example, more able students can take GCSE mathematics a year early and then study advanced supplementary level mathematics in Year 11.

The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 meets statutory requirements and caters for the learning needs of all students. For example, good provision is made for the teaching of modern foreign languages and for improving students' basic skills. There is also good provision for students' personal, social and health education and for their understanding of citizenship. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities, including sport, additional subjects for study, and artistic and creative clubs and groups gives students many opportunities to explore or display their skills and interests.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This aspect of the school's provision is good. The school is a safe and supportive environment and there is a commitment to equality of opportunity for every student. The welfare and academic needs of vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met by teachers, learning mentors and support assistants. Such students achieved well in the 2007 examinations. The school makes good use of a range of outside agencies to support it in its work. Special provision is made for the very small number of students who do not attend classes to enable them to keep abreast of the work being done. The school has recently introduced effective procedures for assessing and monitoring students' progress and for intervening when weaknesses are discovered. These procedures have improved significantly since the previous inspection but have yet to have a sustained impact on pupils' progress. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are well established and meet statutory requirements. Health and safety checks and risk assessments are conducted on a regular basis, particularly when visits are made out of school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher provides strong leadership and she has been the driving force behind the improvement in standards in 2007. Leadership is not exercised by all of her most senior staff, however, and therefore the pace of change and the drive for excellence is no better than satisfactory. The headteacher has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to be done to build on the recent improvement in standards. There are still unresolved issues from the last inspection within the leadership team relating to the monitoring and evaluation of performance and the use of challenging targets to raise standards. Training and support for governors have enabled them to have a sharper focus on this issue. Governance is therefore satisfactory. The quality of leadership and management at head of department level has improved and has contributed to the rise in the school's results. It is here that challenging targets are used well to raise standards. The chair of governors works tirelessly to promote the school's interest and to secure improvements in buildings and resources.

Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is now good and there is better use of assessments to guide students in their work. The school's capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

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

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?	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	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	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 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Dene Community School of Technology, Durham

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We had an interesting two days and enjoyed meeting and talking to many of you. Please give our thanks to your parents for sending us their views on the quality of education you are receiving.

We found your school provides you with a satisfactory standard of education.

GCSE results improved significantly this year and progress was good. The school's assessments and the standard of work we saw in lessons show that the progress you are making is also good. This is an improvement on the rate of progress seen in past years. Our satisfactory overall judgement is because the improvements need to be sustained over a longer period of time for us to make a judgement of good.

Your school has developed the curriculum to make it more relevant to your needs and so has enabled many more students this year to proceed to further education or employment. We hope that Year 11 students are equally successful when their time comes to move on.

Those students who are vulnerable in any way and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by the school. You tell us that students get on well together and that bullying is not a problem. You enjoy school, like being with your friends and you take part in a wide range of activities, including helping in the primary schools. You have the basic skills to make the most of the next stage of your education and many personal qualities to make a success of your lives. We did feel, however, that you need to be more independent in your approach to work and accept that taking risks and learning from mistakes is a necessary part of learning and developing for all of us.

Senior and middle leaders in the school understand that they need to be active in raising standards, particularly in English and in making work more challenging for students.

Thank you again for your warm welcome. Enjoy the Christmas break.

Best wishes

Brian Dower

Lead inspector