

Dartford Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118785
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313088
Inspection dates	8–9 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Frater HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	822
6th form	90
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Sivell
Headteacher	Patricia Burleigh
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Heath Lane Dartford DA1 2LY
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Dartford Technology College is a smaller than average girls' school, with a small minority of male students in the sixth form. Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average, although approximately 30% of higher attaining pupils from the local primary schools are selected to attend neighbouring grammar schools. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average. The vast majority of students are White British. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups, and particularly those speaking English as an additional language, is below average. There are more students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than average.

The school was awarded specialist technology status in 1997 and a second specialist status of vocational education in September 2007. It provides joint sixth form provision with a neighbouring school and is part of a local consortium of schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Dartford Technology College provides a satisfactory education and good care and support. It is an inclusive school, where vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or English as an additional language, achieve well.

Energetic and committed leadership by the headteacher and the relatively new senior team has been instrumental in securing students' good personal development and well-being. In academic terms, students have underachieved in Years 7 to 9 in recent years but the school has responded and students currently in these year groups are now making satisfactory progress. In particular, the school has managed to halt the downward trend in science test results, which followed the introduction of a condensed science course in Years 7 and 8. The school's own assessment evidence indicates that it is on course to meet or exceed the target set for students to achieve five or more GCSEs at A* to C grades this year, but whilst an improvement, this still represents only satisfactory progress. Current targets are not challenging enough to ensure good progress across all subjects and key stages, because the school's systems for target setting and monitoring students' progress are still at an early stage of development.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory but variable. The school has a clear agenda to improve the quality of teaching and learning and it is providing additional training and support for teachers. Senior leaders are monitoring the quality of teaching, but judgements are inconsistent and do not give an accurate view across the school. This is partly because arrangements are relatively new, but mainly because they are not based sharply on the academic progress of students.

To improve the quality of learning, the school has introduced several curricular initiatives. While most meet the range of students' differing needs, evaluation of their effectiveness has not always been timely enough to avoid any negative impact on students' achievement, as in science. Technology and vocational specialist status has had a positive impact on provision, particularly in relation to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and the breadth of curriculum, but not yet on raising standards across the school.

The quality of pastoral care and support for students continues to be a key strength of the school. The school has implemented stronger systems for behaviour management. As a result, students' behaviour around the school and in most lessons is good, although a small number of lessons are disrupted when the work that is set fails to interest and challenge the students. Academic guidance is not so strong because the 'learning managers' are not able to access precise data on students' progress towards their subject targets. Senior leaders and managers work well with external agencies and partners to enhance the personal development and well-being of the students. The quality of self-evaluation at all levels is not yet firmly rooted in a secure analysis of all the available evidence. As a result, progress in addressing issues such as the underachievement in Years 7 to 9 has been slow. In spite of this, the successes so far show that the school's capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory with good features. Strong leadership ensures it has significant strengths in the care and support that it offers students, and in the broader curriculum which has been developed since the last inspection. As the head of sixth form rightly acknowledges,

the academic guidance given to students is a relative weakness. The quality of information given to students about their progress is variable across subjects, although some good practice is evident, for example in health and social care.

Students report high levels of satisfaction with the sixth form. They feel 'at home' and that teachers have a 'bond' with their parents. This means that any personal or social problems that might be a barrier to their development are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Examination results are below the national average, but as students enter the sixth form with standards that are also below average, this represents satisfactory achievement. Students achieve best in media, physical education, and leisure and tourism; they achieve less than might be expected, based on their prior attainment, in English literature, drama and sociology. The curriculum is good as it enables access to a wide range of both academic and vocational courses that students can combine in a way that suits their needs and interests. The good arrangements with the local consortium ensure that students have access to a wide range of opportunities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use self-evaluation more effectively to ensure teaching and learning, and curricular initiatives, improve achievement and standards.
- Improve the use of progress tracking to identify and address potential underachievement and to inform students how to improve their work.
- Set more ambitious targets to raise expectations across the school.

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

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average, although the proportion of more able students is below average. Students in Years 7 to 9 have made inadequate progress over the past two years. As a result, national test results in English, mathematics and science for Year 9 declined. The results were exceptionally low in 2007, mainly because of a steep decline in attainment in science. Students were entered for the science test a year early, in Year 8, and the evaluation of the two-year condensed course was not timely enough to minimise the negative impact on pupils' progress, and this has had a significant impact on the results. However, students in Years 7 to 9 are now making satisfactory progress.

Students in Years 10 and 11 make satisfactory progress overall, and good progress in some subjects, particularly English and mathematics. Results in GCSE examinations remain broadly average.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language, make good progress as a result of the effective specialist provision they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students value each other's customs and beliefs, believe that bullying should be, and is, addressed effectively in the school, and form good relationships with each other. Behaviour around the school and in the large majority of lessons is good. Behaviour lapses in a small minority of lessons where the quality of teaching or the curriculum content does not engage students. Students are well aware of their own safety both within school and in the community. They have a good understanding of the need for healthy lifestyles, as shown in their awareness of the links between healthy eating and disease prevention, and participate in a wide range of sport.

Students make a good contribution to the community and school in a number of ways, including supporting charities and the well-managed and effective school council. Work experience, the inclusion of a vocational option in Years 10 and 11, and good use of ICT help prepare students well for the world of work. Attendance has improved to broadly average, but a small minority of students are absent too often, despite good procedures for promoting attendance. The school is aware that in some lessons, students are not active enough in their learning to fully enjoy it.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons seen during the inspection ranged from good to inadequate, but the majority of lessons were satisfactory. In good lessons, teachers plan tasks that are stimulating and allow students to make good progress. In these lessons, teachers identify the needs of a range of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This was particularly apparent in a Year 7 French lesson that was observed, where the teacher skilfully and confidently engaged students, gave them all an opportunity to use the target language, and progress was palpable. In almost all lessons, good relationships between teachers and students are clearly evident and key to creating a positive climate for learning. In satisfactory lessons, learning objectives are in fact tasks, the pace is slow and there are few opportunities for students to engage actively in their learning. As a result, students become passive and progress is slow. In the small number of inadequate lessons, this leads to some disruptive behaviour that inhibits learning. Assessment practice is inconsistent. It is good in English as students work to short-term targets. However, in some departments work is not marked regularly enough and targets for improvement are not evident.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum has improved since the last inspection and matches the needs and aspirations of students more effectively. One improvement in Year 7 is 'Opening Minds', which encourages the active engagement of students, improves their ability to learn, and supports their transition

from primary to secondary education. A less successful initiative is the condensed science curriculum in Years 7 to 8, introduced to allow an early start to GCSE in Year 9, but resulting in lower levels of achievement in science in the earlier years. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive extra numeracy and literacy lessons, but the school recognises that the development of literacy skills is not consistent across the curriculum. In Years 10 to 11, vocational specialist status has led to the introduction of a compulsory vocational subject; however, it is too early to evaluate its impact. The school has also introduced a citizenship and values programme to address a previous area for development, although shortcomings remain in the way it is delivered.

The school's specialist technology status has increased the use of ICT in lessons, but has not yet had an impact on raising standards across subjects. Participation in the wide range of extra-curricular activities is good and contributes to the positive ethos of the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Support for students with emotional or relationship difficulties is well coordinated and effective. Attendance is improving, owing to a combination of thorough checking, frequent contact with parents, and a very strong emphasis on praise for those with best attendance. Arrangements for safeguarding students are very thorough and fully meet government guidelines. Over the last year, changes to the behaviour policy and the creation of a separate inclusion unit have been successful in reducing both exclusions and referrals to senior staff.

Academic guidance is not as strong. Some individual departments track students' progress carefully. However, this is not the case at whole-school level and senior leaders do not have a close view of students' progress, strengths and areas of underachievement early enough. Students are mostly aware of their target grades, but teachers' marking too often does not give students enough specific advice on what to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The strong leadership of the headteacher has led to many innovative developments in the school, including the use of ICT and the Year 7 curriculum. The headteacher has recently formed a new senior team and, together, they provide clear direction for the care, guidance and support of students, and for subject leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning. There are emerging strengths at middle leadership level, for instance effective systems for developing schemes of work and sharing good practice in English, and for tracking students' progress in Key Stage 4 science. Subject leaders are engaging in self-evaluation. However, whilst much information is collected across the school, the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation is constrained by the very limited analysis of all the available evidence and of the impact on students' achievement and standards.

Governors discharge their responsibilities appropriately, but they receive too little information to enable them to challenge the level of achievement and standards reached by students in all key stages. Current Year 11 and particularly Year 10 students have much ground to make up

as a result of lower achievement in Key Stage 3. Targets have been set to represent satisfactory progress for these year groups, but they are not challenging enough to ensure their good progress across the school.

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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	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well 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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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	3

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	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	4	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	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

Dear Students

Inspection of Dartford Technology College, Dartford, DA1 2LY

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for making us welcome and helping us with the inspection. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you, in your lessons and around the school. We have taken students' and parents' views into account in arriving at our judgement that the school provides satisfactory education and good care and support.

Your headteacher and senior team, supported by staff throughout the school, are committed to securing your good personal development and well-being, and to including all of you in the life of the school. You told us that the teachers are friendly and helpful, that you form good relationships with each other, and that you notice behaviour has improved. You like the improvements in the curriculum, particularly the increased choice of subjects in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. We noticed that a small minority of you still misbehave in lessons that do not interest you or challenge you to participate.

While you make satisfactory progress across the school now, those of you in Year 10 have to work extra hard to catch up from the below average results you attained in national tests in Year 9.

To help you make this, and even better, progress, we have asked the staff to:

- evaluate their developments in teaching and learning, and the curriculum, to ensure they are improving your progress and the standards you reach
- improve their tracking of your progress in all your subjects so that they can regularly check that you are not falling behind and inform you (and your parents) how you can improve your work
- set more ambitious targets for you, to raise expectations of what you can achieve.

You can help by monitoring your own progress towards your subject targets. With best wishes for the future

Sue Frater

Her Majesty's Inspector