

Swanley Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118786
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313089
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Alison Storey 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)	558
Sixth form	55
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barry Lowe
Headteacher	Julie Bramley
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2005
School address	St Mary's Road Swanley BR8 7TE
Telephone number	01322 665231
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Swanley Technology College is a smaller than average secondary school. It is a non-selective school in an area where there is selection. Most students are from a White British background and very few speak English as an additional language. About one in five students are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is higher than average. More students leave and join the school other than at the usual times. Almost half the students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, a much higher proportion than found nationally. These students have a range of learning difficulties; nearly one in five of them have behavioural, emotional and social needs. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is below the national average.

The school has had specialist technology status since September 2005. It offers vocational education for students from age 14 through a partnership with Wilmington Enterprise College and Hextable School, and makes joint provision for sixth form students through a partnership with five local schools and a college. The Harvey Centre, a multi-agency centre offering specialist support services for students and the local community, opened on site last year; there is also separately managed childcare for 0-7 year olds.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Swanley Technology College is providing a satisfactory standard of education. It aims to be 'a technology rich community school, a centre of excellence for vocational education, to raise attainment and aspirations' and the scale of improvement since the last inspection puts it in a good position to realise this vision. Leadership and management are good and ensure the college genuinely has the best interests of all its students at heart. There is a real drive to remove barriers to learning, help students to succeed and equip them with the skills they need for the future, which starts with the headteacher, governors and senior staff. It is seen across all aspects of the college's work but is most evident in the changes to the curriculum since the last inspection, which is now well matched to the needs and aspirations of the students. Specialist technology status, and links with other schools and colleges, has broadened the range of courses available to students from Year 9. The emphasis on vocational learning appeals to students because the courses are practical, relevant to what they want to do in the future and increase their chances of gaining qualifications. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Programmes are in place to develop students' learning skills; almost all lessons seen were satisfactory, which was better than found at the last inspection, and almost half were good or better. There is a focus on making sure students understand what they are learning, how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Staff know students well and work hard to make sure individuals have the right package of support for their learning and personal development. The new Harvey Centre has been instrumental in providing access to a range of support for students who need it to help them develop their personal and social skills. Behaviour has improved significantly in recent months with the introduction of a new four-step system and is generally good. Students understand what is expected of them and what the consequences of poor behaviour will be.

Achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 11. Students, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress but because their starting points are so low the standards they reach are low compared with those found nationally. In 2008, although all students achieved at least one qualification and most gained five or more passes, the proportion attaining five or more higher grade passes was below average and the average score for the students' best eight subjects was exceptionally low. Achievement in the sixth form is inadequate. Too many students do not make satisfactory progress because they are not guided to choose the right courses.

Some students do not do as well as they could because their attendance is so low. A significant minority miss the equivalent of a day or more per week. The college is working hard to improve this. It has had some recent success in reducing the number of poor attenders and improving the attendance rate of the youngest students. However, overall attendance remains below average because too many parents do not make sure their children turn up regularly.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 4

The effectiveness of the sixth form is inadequate. The curriculum offer is good in that it caters for students of all abilities, with strong vocational provision and good opportunities for developing students' personal skills and self-esteem. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and there are good systems in place to monitor the progress of individual students. However,

many students have been poorly guided in their initial choice of courses. This has resulted in a large number failing to finish these courses and in low pass rates. The results in AS and A-level examinations, apart from art, show that standards are well below average, with students underachieving because they make insufficient progress. Leadership and management are satisfactory; senior staff responsible for the sixth form have recognised the shortfalls and already have plans for more rigorous entry procedures and better progression routes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards at the end of Year 11 by increasing the number of qualifications students gain, particularly at the higher grades.
- Work with parents to improve attendance, especially to reduce the proportion of students who are persistently absent.
- Raise standards in the sixth form by providing students with realistic guidance and advice in determining their choice of courses. 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' attainment when they enter the college is low for their age. Their progress at Key Stage 3 improved following the last inspection. However, an increase in the number of sessions lost through poor attendance and exclusions has had an inevitable impact on standards in the last two years. The result is that in 2008 just over a half the pupils reached the expected level in mathematics and fewer than this did so in English and science. Although these results are exceptionally low, they still represent satisfactory progress given students' starting points.

The progress students make during Key Stage 4 has not been as strong in recent years, largely because the curriculum and the range of qualifications on offer to students have not matched their needs well enough. As a result, some have not reached their potential. Students in the current Year 11 are the first to benefit from vocational courses offered at a higher level. The college's data and observations of progress in lessons show that these students are likely to reach, and some will exceed, expectations based on their starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. A small number of parents raised concerns about behaviour and bullying, but students generally say that the new system to promote positive behaviour has been effective and that the very few instances of bullying are dealt with effectively. Inspectors found that behaviour in lessons and around the college is generally good and that instances of inappropriate behaviour are dealt with well. Students feel safe on the school site and appreciate the peer mentoring system where older students support younger students in their tutor groups. They make a good contribution to the community through activities such as the junior sports leaders' programme, substantial fund raising and local community projects. The school council is a large and vibrant group, giving good opportunities to a significant proportion of the students to make their views known. Most students understand the need for a healthy lifestyle and appreciate the college's messages about healthy eating. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Most

are respectful during the early morning 'thought for the day' and take active roles in events such as International Food Week and 'Flavour Day', a celebration of Indian dance and culture.

Although literacy and numeracy levels are low, students' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory because of the breadth of vocational courses and opportunities for work experience. The vast majority of students clearly enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning. Despite this, attendance is below average because too many students let things outside college influence them and their parents do not make sure they attend as regularly as they should.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and were good in about half of the lessons seen. The good lessons were characterised by an emphasis on developing students' skills for learning. In these lessons, staff clearly knew students as individuals and tailored work to match their needs. Teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning, and they appreciate that the students learn more effectively when activities are practical, purposeful and interesting. Skilful questioning checks students' understanding and challenges them to have a go at applying their knowledge. Teachers make sure the students are clear what they are learning, how they will know if they have been successful and what they need to do to move to the next level. Students are supported to assess their own and others' progress.

However, there are still weaknesses in teaching and learning. In some lessons, there is too much talking by the teacher and not enough challenge for students to explain their thinking and to help them understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Not enough use is made of assessments of students' learning, which means work is not always well matched to their different needs and, as a result, their progress is slower.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum overall is good. It complies with statutory requirements, provides a wide range of choice and is well matched to the needs and aspirations of the students. The 'Building Learning Power' project in Year 7 has been introduced to equip students with the skills they need for learning, such as teamwork and research. In Years 10 and 11, the increasingly diverse range of vocational and academic options caters well for students' interests. A wide range of visits, undertaken by all departments, enriches learning. Students participate in a number of activities outside the normal school day, including some which are planned to help them build their self-confidence and social skills.

The college's specialist technology status, with its opportunities for a wide range of design and technology options and vocational learning, has had a positive impact on students' motivation. This is improving their attitudes to learning and building their confidence that they can succeed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The college has good systems in place to care for and support its students, with a holistic approach to meeting their pastoral and academic needs. Procedures for safeguarding students

are robust. Students speak highly of the support that they receive in the college, from the induction arrangements through to individual support when they need it, and generally feel valued within a caring community. Increasingly, staff are mentoring individual students, particularly those at risk of not reaching their potential or even dropping out of college altogether. Support for those students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and this enables them to match the rate of progress made by others across the college. Vulnerable students are identified early and closely tracked, with a support package tailored to meet their learning and social needs. The college is rightly concerned that a number of these students are poor attenders. It is working well with other agencies to improve the importance students and their families attach to attending college regularly and is making progress towards achieving the attendance target that it has agreed with the local authority.

Most students are aware of their academic targets and many know what they have to do to achieve them in their subjects. Good practice, both in marking and in lessons, help students understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, although it is not consistently applied throughout the college.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's determination to provide the best for the community has been key to the improvements seen since the last inspection. Her creative approach to new appointments, and changes in roles within the college, have created a larger senior team better able to take on the range of responsibilities and increased capacity at middle manager level. Some staff are relatively new to their roles but support from more experienced colleagues means that they are already effective in some aspects of their work. Governance has improved since the last inspection and is now good. All statutory requirements are met and systems are in place to ensure governors have an up to date and clear picture of how well the college is doing.

Systems have been developed at different levels to track how well students are doing and to set targets for their future attainment. Specialist status has been influential in this, with the systems embedded in the technology department influencing practice in science and mathematics and more recently in English. There are also systems in place to check that students in Year 11 are on track to attain the qualifications of which they are capable. However, practice is not embedded or consistent across the school. Self-evaluation is effective in that it identifies the right priorities for improvement, although the college sometimes has an over-generous view of its success, basing it more on how much it has done rather the difference it has made to students.

Overall, the scale of improvement since the last inspection, the good use made of specialist status to drive forward improvement, the strengthening of the senior and middle team and clear plans for the future demonstrate good capacity for further improvement.

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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	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	4
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?	2	3
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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	4	
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?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	4

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
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	2	
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 Swanley Technology College, Swanley BR8 7TE

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your college recently. We enjoyed meeting you and learnt a lot about Swanley from the discussions we had with you in meetings, lessons and around college.

We know that you enjoy college much more now because the curriculum is more interesting and relevant to what you would like to do in the future, and that you particularly enjoy lessons that are practical. We think that the college knows each of you well. The staff work hard to support you to help you to reach your potential. As a result, your behaviour is generally good.

We decided that the college gives you a satisfactory standard of education. However, in the sixth form it is inadequate because students have been poorly guided in their choice of courses and many have failed to complete them successfully. The curriculum is good and teaching and learning are satisfactory. Although standards are low, your achievement in Year 7 to 11 is satisfactory. However, there are improvements that need to be made and we discussed three important ones with your headteacher, senior staff and the chair of governors before we left. One is about raising standards. We know that most of you get five GCSE or equivalent passes by the end of Year 11 but we believe that many of you could get more qualifications and higher grades. Second, we are very concerned that attendance is so low, so we have asked the school to redouble its work with you and your parents to make sure more of you are in college for more of the time. Lastly, we asked them to make sure that those students who choose to continue their education in the sixth form get the right advice and guidance so that they have a greater chance of success.

I need to ask you to help in making these improvements. We know that some students have not done as well as they could because they have not attended college regularly enough or their behaviour has not been good enough. We can see that behaviour has improved and there are signs that attendance is improving, but you all need to make sure you turn up to college regularly so that you achieve as well as you possibly can.

Yours faithfully

Alison Storey

Her Majesty's Inspector.