

Hartsdown Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118816
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313101
Inspection dates	29–30 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheila Browning

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	1120
6th form	136
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ronald Foster
Headteacher	Andrew Somers
Date of previous school inspection	4 November 2002
School address	George V Avenue Margate CT9 5RE
Telephone number	01843 227957
Fax number	01843 299642

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Hartsdown is a large specialist Technology College with a popular sixth form that is part of a local consortium. Almost half of the students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) or a statement of need, which is comparatively very high. The college also has a designated hearing impaired unit for 12 students. The numbers entitled to free school meals are high. The college has a significant and increasing number of students from migrant families, in the main Czech Roma, and a high and increasing number of vulnerable students. The college has experienced considerable difficulties in recruiting and retaining teaching staff. In recognition of its work the college has gained many awards, including Investors in People and the Healthy School awards and Artsmark silver status. The college is the base for a 'Quartet in the Community' which links local schools and puts on a variety of community activities for families in Thanet. Through its technology status the college has evolved a successful range of activities for pupils at local primary schools and adult learners.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hartsdown is a good and effective college with some outstanding features. The outstanding leadership by the principal and dedicated leadership of senior management has successfully created a culture of 'working together for continued improvement'. This vision is shared amongst staff, students, parents, governors and the local community and Hartsdown is seen as the heart of the community. One parent commented, 'We are looking forward to the future and the challenges ahead'. The specialist technology status has been used effectively to provide an extensive range of academic, vocational and work-related courses in which students achieve well. Year 7 students enjoy being in the Transition school, which supports their learning in a smaller environment. Additional funding has been well spent to enhance provision, resources and the learning environment. In some subjects, there have been difficulties in recruiting specialist staff, which has led to variations in standards. These difficulties have largely been overcome and a rigorous monitoring and support programme has helped improve teachers' skills in all subjects so that teaching is good. The good practices seen could be usefully shared to ensure all lessons are lively, interesting, well paced and challenging. However, an outstanding example is the project '-Hartsdown man' who was excavated in the grounds. This has really excited students and has promoted discussions and research about different beliefs, cultures and society in the Iron Age and the impact these have on us today. It has involved developing and transferring skills learnt in different subjects from technology and the arts to history.

Most students join with low attainment, especially in literacy and numeracy, and by the end of Year 11, standards are below average but rising, with students achieving particularly well in vocational subjects. Though this reflects good achievement, the proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades when English and mathematics are included is significantly lower than average. Students receive outstanding care, guidance and support, a direct result of the strong emphasis placed on reducing any barriers to learning. Their good personal development is seen in their positive attitudes and good behaviour. Many say how much they enjoy Hartsdown but, for a significant minority, attendance is a problem and the college is doing everything it can to tackle this. Students show a good awareness of how to lead safe, healthy lifestyles and are fully involved in the local community and in the numerous extra-curricular activities. Senior leaders are committed to improvement and evaluation is being firmly embedded in all areas of the college's work. Good leadership and management and secure self-evaluation of the college's performance are leading to substantial improvements in important areas and ensure a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form's overall effectiveness is good; this year it has the highest ever number of students. The college's inclusive approach means that students are accepted on courses with lower GCSE grades than are usually required. Standards are below average, particularly in some of the academic A level courses, but results reflect good achievement, especially in vocational subjects. Most teaching is good, with a small proportion outstanding. The curriculum is responsive to students' interests and aptitudes; for example, introducing media studies has proved very popular. Equally, it supports students to study at other institutions. Good leadership and management are ensuring that set priorities are the right ones for future improvement. The role of sixth formers in the vertical tutor groups has not yet been established. Sixth form

students contribute well to the community, helping in lessons with younger students and working in local primary schools. Students are given helpful guidance about future career options and increasing numbers go on to university. Reflecting on the fun that he and his friends had in the sixth form, one ex-student observed, 'We acknowledge the vital role that supportive teachers, a relaxed environment and stimulating courses have had on our whole lives'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades including English and mathematics.
- Spread the good practice seen in teaching and learning, with an emphasis on greater variety, pace and challenge.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' achievement is good because of well-targeted interventions, successful use of data, an innovative curriculum and improved teaching and learning. Standards in both Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations are below average but with an overall improving trend. Given their low starting points, this represents good progress. Inspection evidence and college data confirm students are on track to reach targets that are even more challenging. In 2007, nearly half of the students gained five or more GCSE grades A* to C, with the number of A* to G grades close to average. Many students achieved well in vocational subjects, although when English and mathematics are included, results were not as good. Early entrants for information and communication technology (ICT) GNVQ and GCSE mathematics examinations have already passed successfully. Specialist status has been vital in helping to raise achievement and reduce staffing difficulties in some subjects. Sharply focused support for the many different groups of students with learning difficulties, those learning English and those with hearing impairment ensures they achieve well. The college is aware of, and is tackling, the need to improve the performance of all students in mathematics. In the sixth form, standards are below average, particularly in some of the academic A-level courses, but results reflect good achievement, especially in vocational subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students greatly enjoy their education and value highly the support they are given, although this is not reflected in the attendance levels of a small minority. Many commented that 'this is a good college and we enjoy being here'. Behaviour is good, despite some inconsistency in how teachers manage behaviour in lessons. Exclusions have increased, in response to a drive to improve behaviour. Current trends support the college's view that this has peaked, and exclusions are now reducing. Students say they feel safe, well cared for and that incidents of bullying or racism are rare. They are confident in the very effective pastoral system to resolve any difficulties. In this friendly atmosphere, relationships thrive. Consequently, students have positive attitudes and they make a strong contribution to the college and wider community. They adopt healthy lifestyles, choose healthy eating options and take advantage of the strong

emphasis placed on sport, with some notable success. Involvement in the 'Quartet community health fayres' has helped the students and their families learn more about healthy eating. More students in Year 13 than in Year 12 take advantage of physical exercise and join in other activities promoted. The many cultural activities through music, drama, art and enrichment contribute strongly to their good spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development. Students are aware of and are sensitive to the needs of others and welcome those from different cultural backgrounds. Students have a 'voice' through the college council and students' views are regularly sought.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Recent training, development and intensive support for specific faculties have improved teaching and learning. Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject and have a clear understanding of students' capabilities. Students' progress is monitored rigorously and students know what standard they are at and their targets for the future. Suggestions about how to improve are effectively made on major pieces of coursework, but day-to-day marking does not consistently help students to improve still further. Teachers use praise to good effect, building students' self-esteem and encouraging them to take risks. As a result, students work well in small groups, value the ideas of others and are confident to express their views. Where learning is less successful, lessons lack pace, with a single activity predominating. Eventually, students lose enthusiasm, start to talk to each other and achieve less well. With good diagnosis of need and good quality support, students with learning disadvantages, those learning English and those with hearing impairment make good progress. Teaching assistants are well deployed to the benefit of all learners. Sixth form students are given a great degree of responsibility for their own learning, which they accept with enthusiasm. They comment on how much support they receive from their teachers and on how hard they work on enjoyable and challenging tasks.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The innovative curriculum has some significant strengths. The Year 7 Transition school, with a strong emphasis on basic skills and a mix of subjects taught through special projects, really engages students. The flexible curriculum is responsive to students' interests and abilities through various 'pathways' designed to meet their individual needs. An extra emphasis is placed on mathematics, science, ICT and all technological subjects. Strong links with external partners ensure students are well prepared for their next stage of education or employment. Numerous clubs and activities contribute to students' enjoyment and personal development. The college recognises that a more balanced personal, social, health and citizenship education programme and consistently effective tutor sessions will contribute more strongly to students' personal development. Students with learning disadvantages, those learning English and those with hearing impairment gain much from highly effective lessons, which support them. An appropriate range of courses is offered in the sixth form and local consortium.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Senior and middle leadership, mentors and pastoral managers provide a wide-ranging support network. The college has extensive links with external agencies to meet students' needs. Links with family liaison officers and police community support are well used to help resolve issues outside the college which would otherwise impact on students' well-being. Outstanding liaisons with multi-agencies, including the local authority, are hugely beneficial to students' well-being. The ways in which the college identifies students who may be vulnerable or at risk are thorough. Support for students with emotional or behavioural difficulties in the Turnaround centre is outstanding and they are quickly reintegrated. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are secure. High quality care and support is a key reason for students' good achievement. Strong pastoral support ensures a safe and caring environment in which students of all ages can flourish. The college very effectively uses the wealth of tracking data to monitor students' progress and set challenging targets. As a result, good interventions are put in place to support students' achievement. Students know their current levels and grades and what they should be aiming for.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Senior leadership is highly effective and strongly focused on improvement as are middle leadership who feel valued and supported. Students and staff acknowledge the success of the improvements, which the principal has introduced, reflecting his outstanding leadership. He has generated a culture where it is fine to accept help to do better, whether by faculty leaders who need to raise standards, or students who need support to cope with college life. It is in this culture that standards and achievement have the potential to improve. Senior leadership evaluates what is happening well and appreciates that innovations, such as the Year 7 Transition curriculum, will need careful review and adjustments to evolve successfully. Their understanding of how teaching needs to develop, to stimulate students' learning and progress, is realistic. The governing body brings a wide range of age and experience to its work and it is an asset to the college's development. Members are linked to faculties and visit the college regularly. They are proudly supportive of the principal and his focus on improving behaviour, standards and achievement. Governors do not just encourage developments but also carefully monitor their impact and effectiveness. The structure of the college's prospectus, written under the headings of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda, is a clear sign of how thoughtfully students' whole development is nurtured. Celebrating its half century in 2008, the college has worked hard to create a tailor-made curriculum focused on developing students' skills, knowledge and values necessary for life in the 21st Century.

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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?	2	2
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?	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	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	2	
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 the learners' needs?	2	2
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?	1	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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	2	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

30 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Hartsdown Technology College, Margate, Kent CT9 5RE

Thank you for making the inspectors so welcome when we recently visited your college. We spoke with a number of you, and to the principal and many of your teachers. We are pleased to be able to share our findings with you and to tell you that we agree with many of your views. Overall, we judged Hartsdown College to be good, with some outstanding features.

- These are some important things we found out about your college:
- The principal leads the college outstandingly well; senior and middle management and governors are determined to improve the college for everyone.
- Teaching is good and you told us you enjoyed many of your lessons.
- You achieve well, those of you who take vocational courses particularly so.
- You have produced some good work and are right to be proud of your college.
- Your attitudes and behaviour are good and you get on well with each other and respect your differences.
- The staff care for you exceptionally well. This confirms what you told us about feeling well supported and that you received good advice about your work and progress.
- The curriculum is really well adapted to meet your interests and needs.
- You know how to lead safe, healthy lives and so many of you are involved in the many activities at college and in the community.
- This is what we have asked the college to do to make it even better:
- To help more of you to achieve five A* to C grades including English and mathematics.
- To spread the good practice we saw in teaching and learning, and ensure that all your lessons have greater variety, pace and challenge.

You told us how much you enjoyed being at Hartsdown and that you have noticed the many recent improvements. We are sure that you want to help make the college even better than it is and, with your support and hard work, the college will go from strength to strength.

Sheila Browning Lead inspector

Annex B



30 January 2008

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Lead inspector