

Chaucer Technology School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118924
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313152
Inspection dates	30 April –1 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham 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	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1318
6th form	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carol
Headteacher	Simon Murphy
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Spring Lane Canterbury CT1 1SU
Telephone number	01227 763636
Fax number	01227 762352

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This is a large, non-selective school in an area with grammar schools and several independent schools. It has a higher proportion of boys than girls. While relatively few students have a statement of special educational need, the proportion of students requiring specific support is much higher than the national average. Their needs relate mostly to language and communication difficulties and behavioural, social and emotional issues. The percentage of students from ethnic minority groups is in line with national averages, as is the percentage whose first language is not English, but this is increasing. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with national figures. The school has specialist technology status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Under the persuasive and purposeful leadership of its headteacher, all aspects of the school's provision are under review and all levels of the school community are involved in the process of managing change. At this stage, the school is providing a satisfactory quality of education, with satisfactory capacity for improvement. Members of the senior leadership team share a coherent vision for the school's development with evidence of growing consistency in methods and standards of assessment, tracking, setting targets and teaching. They recognise that changing habits of thinking and working is one of their greatest challenges and acknowledge that progress so far has been uneven. They rightly assess leadership and management as satisfactory until the impact of their planning and implementation is clear. Another significant challenge is to raise standards and improve achievement; there is evidence that recent action is beginning to have a positive impact. Most impressive is the extent to which students from all years are able and keen to make a serious contribution. Those elected to serve on the school council have drawn up detailed plans based on extensive consultation for the move to five 'colleges of learning' and are well informed advocates for this reorganisation. Not all parents understand the rationale for or details of the planned changes but most express confidence in the headteacher's leadership.

Standards are low but not exceptionally so and overall achievement across Years 7 to 11 is satisfactory. In 2007, although the school's targets were not met, there was an improvement in the proportion obtaining five or more A* to C grades in GCSE examinations and in those obtaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Systems for identifying and tackling underachievement have become more rigorous and there is evidence that this is beginning to raise standards. However, poor literacy skills across all subjects are limiting progress. Students across a very wide ability range have been encouraged to stay into the sixth form and many have then struggled to meet the demands of traditional AS and A-level subjects. The school is introducing more vocational options as part of a comprehensive overhaul of what is currently a satisfactory curriculum. Specialist technology status has had limited impact on the curriculum.

The school's leadership and management have responded to an unevenness of performance across departments by introducing a sharper system for monitoring teaching and learning. There is now a common framework for lesson planning and assessment, and a programme of departmental reviews and lesson observation is well underway. The quality of teaching and learning overall is satisfactory, with the best being lively, challenging and varied. Where there is lack of pace and limited opportunity for students to play an active part in their learning through group work, enquiry and practical problem solving, low-level disruption inhibits their progress.

Students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, supported by careful and competent care, guidance and support. Although behaviour can occasionally become unsettled and unsettling, most students treat each other and adults with consideration and say they feel safe at school. Most are keen to do well and respond positively to encouragement. They are aware of reasons for adopting a healthy lifestyle and many take part in the range of sporting activities on offer. Limited literacy and numeracy skills mean that preparation for the world of work is only satisfactory. However, all students follow at least one practical or vocational option and undertake work experience. For those not considering higher education or further training, this proves a useful gateway to employment.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Strengthening the sixth form is a key element in the school's strategic plan. Its current provision and capacity to improve are satisfactory. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory, strengthened by the arrival in January of a new manager. He has established more demanding systems to monitor teaching and learning and improve students' attitudes to learning. Some initiatives are already bringing benefits, for example, significantly improved attendance and more buoyant student morale.

Standards in most AS and A-level courses are significantly below average but students' overall achievement is satisfactory, given their levels of prior attainment. Achievement is most marked in vocational subjects such as business and in A-level sociology. Progress in Year 12 is improving in response to systematic monitoring and well-targeted support established by the new sixth form leader. Close attention to attendance and to attitude and effort in lessons is reaping rewards, and students speak positively about their experience. Punctuality remains an issue. Fewer students now talk about leaving at the end of Year 12 and about 50% go on to higher education after Year 13. Their preparation for life beyond school is satisfactory. Lessons generally contain a range of tasks to maintain students' interest and some actively develop independent thinking and evaluative skills. Feedback relates closely to examination criteria but does not routinely give students detailed guidance on how to improve. The curriculum has developed positively since the last inspection with more vocational options and an increased range and level of courses offered through the Canterbury 14–19 partnership, complemented by a satisfactory programme of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. Overall, teaching and learning and the curriculum are satisfactory.

Sixth formers understand the need for a healthy lifestyle but participation in clubs and activities is limited. A strong core take on influential leadership roles, for example, on the school council, organising events both within the school and in the wider community, helping younger students with their reading and participating regularly in sports.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and continue to improve achievement in the sixth form.
- Improve and monitor literacy across the curriculum.
- Embed good practice in teaching and learning securely across the curriculum to meet the needs of students of all abilities and aspirations and raise 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

Grade for sixth form: 3

Most students enter the school with lower than average levels of attainment. They make broadly satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11 to reach standards that are low but not exceptionally so. After some years of underachievement in mathematics, results in the 2007 Year 9 national tests improved. Students have been making good progress in English across Years 7 to 9 from a low starting point. None of the core subjects, however, met the school's 2007 targets for

Year 9. There was an improvement in the percentage of Year 11 students gaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades in 2007 and five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics but these results remain below the school's targets and below the national averages.

To raise standards and improve progress, the school has established booster classes, setting by ability in core subjects, holiday revision sessions and more intense academic guidance and support. In-school data and module results indicate that these initiatives are having a positive impact. All groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make similar rates of progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The school's ethos encourages mutual respect and care; it is a cohesive community. Students say that teachers and support staff deal effectively with the infrequent instances of bullying. They feel safe. Those with particular issues over communication and behaviour generally respond well to carefully targeted support and are able to reflect on and improve their relationships. While most students behave well, a few do not. This affects their learning and that of others if teachers do not respond firmly. Attendance is improving and, although they do not enthuse about school, students clearly like to do well.

Students understand the importance of keeping healthy and most take advantage of the sports and activities offered. They take seriously opportunities to contribute to the school's development and day-to-day running. For example, the school council has established careful selection and training for students who monitor standards of learning across the curriculum in all years. Students' preparation for future economic well-being is satisfactory; relatively weak skills in literacy and numeracy compromise the impact of work-related learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching observed in some departments was notably more lively and engaging than in others, with clear objectives, a variety of activity, opportunities for independent learning and collaborative work, confident use of information and communication technology (ICT) and unfrontational but firm classroom management. Where the pace was slow, expectations were not sufficiently challenging and work not pitched at different levels to engage all students, low-level disruption was common and not always dealt with effectively. On occasion, those teaching across an extended period of time have difficulty in maintaining pace and interest, especially with young students or those with limited attention spans, and in ensuring that all students leave the lesson with a clear grasp of what has been covered and why. A more enterprising use of ICT, growing from the school's specialist technology status, has strengthened teaching styles in some departments; in English, for example, it has extended the communication skills of less confident students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum provides individual pathways of academic and vocational courses. Year 7 students are helped in their transition to secondary education by having one teacher for several related subjects. There are particular strengths in the provision for vulnerable pupils, improving their self-esteem and enabling them to make real progress. The alternative curriculum provides appropriate college placements for those who may be less suited to the school environment. There is also sound provision for gifted and talented pupils, for example, through master classes in art and mathematics. The mainstream curriculum, however, does not consistently challenge all students, and basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT lack coordinated development. Plans are well advanced for curriculum change next year as part of the 'colleges of learning' provision, with each college having responsibility for three hours' teaching and learning every week.

The varied programme of enrichment activities and extra-curricular provision is well supported by students, offering a range of sports, performing arts and ICT options. Events such as the Christmas Carol Concert in Canterbury Cathedral are valued and make a positive contribution to students' spiritual, moral and cultural development.

The impact of specialist school status has been primarily in strengthening ICT work and upgrading a selection of teaching resources. There is good provision for design and technology throughout the school, but relatively few connections with business and industry or enterprise schemes.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Improved systems for tracking progress identify underperformance by individuals or groups of students quickly and prompt action follows. Students usually know what their personal targets are but not always how to reach them. Marking of written work, ranging from clear and constructive advice to simple praise, is variable in quality. Opportunities in lessons for assessment and guidance are generally well used. The school's Learning Focus Unit successfully helps challenging students to improve their behaviour. Learning assistants provide well-targeted support in lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. At times, however, these students are not included well enough in lessons as their specific needs are not taken sufficiently into account. Current standards and achievement indicate that not all students receive sound advice in their choice of courses.

Child protection procedures are thorough and arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. The school has taken strong and effective action to improve attendance rates and to strengthen communication with parents as part of a comprehensive programme of pastoral care, well supported by external agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher and leadership team give clear strategic direction and a vision that is supported by governors, staff, students and the majority of parents. Much time and thought are being directed to the impending move into five 'colleges of learning' – a move that will involve physical relocation for departments as well as changing systems and lines of accountability. Much is still in the planning or transition stage, with modest impact on the quality of care and education so far. In some areas, such as exploitation of the school's specialist status, there has been a shift of focus from 'what is to be done now' to 'what can and will be done next year'.

The headteacher and senior leaders know their school well. They have identified development priorities, primarily the raising of standards and achievement, and are working constructively with staff and students to address them. Challenging targets are being set for each department and a more exacting programme of review and assessment is underway. Policies are in place to promote equality of opportunity and tackle any discrimination; racial incidents are rare and the school is highly proactive in its support for vulnerable students. The building significantly limits access for those with various physical disabilities.

Value for money is satisfactory. There are sound financial controls and budgeting is driven by curriculum priorities, but staffing costs are high and not, at present, matched by high standards and achievement. The process of making a successful headteacher appointment in 2006 helped governors to frame their strategic vision and strengthen their own systems. They have a training programme to support their role as 'critical friend' and many play an active part in the school through departmental links.

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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?	3	3
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	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 disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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	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	3	

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	3
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	3	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	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

7 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Chaucer Technology School, Canterbury, CT1 1SU

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently and your willingness to show us your work and talk to us about your experiences at school. As you know, we came to see how well Chaucer Technology School is doing and I am glad of this opportunity to let you know what we found.

We found that, at this stage in your school's reorganization into colleges of learning, it is providing a satisfactory quality of education, both in the main school and in the sixth form. As you will be aware, some changes are already underway. Your school council is playing an important part in drawing up new systems to ensure that the student voice is well represented and to monitor and assess the quality of learning. In addition to detailed and careful planning for next year's changes, your headteacher and his leadership team have put in place more demanding ways to ensure that teaching and learning are effective and to expand the curriculum to meet the range of your abilities and ambitions. The full impact of these initiatives has yet to be seen. On the whole, you are making satisfactory progress but the standards you reach are still lower than the national averages in most subjects. There are signs, however, that standards are rising. We were pleased to know that, despite the occasionally disruptive behaviour of a few, you feel safe at school. You understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and many of you take advantage of the sports and activities on offer.

To ensure that you all do as well as you possibly can, we have asked the governors and your headteacher to:

- raise standards and continue to improve progress in the sixth form
- take steps to improve and monitor your literacy skills in all subjects
- be sure that the most successful approaches to teaching and learning are spread right across the school and maintained.

You can help by making sure that you come to school regularly and are punctual, since missing lessons makes it harder for you to make good progress and do as well as you really can.

With good wishes Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

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With good wishes
Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector