

Dorcan Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126450
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	315553
Inspection dates	31 October –1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Kevin Sheldrick HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1288
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jonathan Wood
Headteacher	Scott Sissons
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	St Paul's Drive Covingham Swindon SN3 5DA
Telephone number	01793 525231
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Dorcan Technology College is an above average size comprehensive, and is closely linked to six feeder primary schools. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. About 7% of pupils are from a range of different minority ethnic backgrounds. An average proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Fewer pupils than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.. The school became a specialist technology college in 1999.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. The overall effectiveness of the school is inadequate. Despite this, the numbers of pupils gaining five or more GCSE A*- C grades has increased because of the improvements the school has made. There are examples of good practice of which the school is rightly proud. Many middle and higher attaining pupils are now making satisfactory progress. However, this is not the case for lower attaining pupils and as a result, achievement and standards are inadequate. The school has adopted some common teaching approaches but in too many classrooms, these are not effective. Although there is some good and outstanding teaching, overall teaching and learning are inadequate. Too often, pupils are not aware of what they have achieved in lessons and this contributes to the existence of negative attitudes to learning, particularly amongst lower attaining pupils. Despite this, behaviour is reasonable and there are good opportunities for pupils to contribute positively to the school community. Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Pupils recognise improvements in behaviour, but a large number of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire remain concerned about this issue. The curriculum is good. Curricular improvements largely explain the rise in some GCSE examination results. The school has used Year 9 well to ensure pupils are on courses that best meet their needs and this contributes to the satisfactory levels of enjoyment. The good care is a major reason why vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties make progress. However, the school has only recently established an effective system that will allow more timely interventions to support the progress of all pupils. Care, support and guidance are satisfactory. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school's monitoring and evaluation of its work have led to improvement. The school largely recognises the improvements it now needs to make. It also recognises that it has not made the achievement of challenging targets for all pupils a sufficient priority in the recent past. The school has made satisfactory progress as a specialist college. Achievement is better in those subjects most associated with its technology specialism and beneficial links exist with a range of partners. However, the specialism has not contributed sufficiently to raising standards for all pupils. All the issues identified at the previous inspection have been addressed effectively. Decisive action has been taken to eradicate most of the inadequate teaching. The staffing situation has improved so that the school now has expertise in all areas. Behaviour management and the curriculum have become strengths and are raising standards. Significantly more learners continue in education after they leave school. All pupils know their long term targets and the teaching of older pupils is ensuring they know how to achieve them. The results in English at Key Stage 3 are now satisfactory, and in GCSE examinations, results have risen for higher attaining pupils. This indicates a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the progress made by lower attaining pupils by ensuring all the work of the school focuses on all pupils achieving challenging targets in every year group.
- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring all lessons are productive, involve reviews of learning and make links to pupils' targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

At Key Stage 4, attainment overall is below average. The gap between the school's results as measured by points scores and the national average has remained largely unchanged from 2005 until 2007. The results gained by lower attaining pupils have been persistently low during this period. Despite this lack of progress in raising the overall results, the school has been successful in improving the outcomes for higher attaining pupils. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*- C grades at GCSE has risen from 41% in 2005 to 55% in 2007. There have also been improvements in the numbers of pupils gaining five or more A*- C grades, including in English and mathematics which have risen from 26% in 2005 to 37% in 2007. At Key Stage 3, standards are below average in science and mathematics but in English, they are broadly average as a result of the success this department has had in improving the use of assessment. In 2005 and 2006, results in all three core subjects were below average. When pupils' previous attainment in primary schools is considered, pupils' progress in the school to the end of Key Stage 4 has been lower than expected from 2005 to 2007. This is because low attaining pupils make inadequate progress. The results over several years confirm that the school has not improved the achievement of these pupils quickly enough. In many of the lessons seen and in pupils' work, inspectors found evidence of inadequate achievement, consistent with the outcomes the school achieves. However, the school's improved monitoring procedures provide evidence that improvements to the curriculum are resulting in older pupils undertaking more courses in which they are making at least the expected progress. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory. The school ensures all pupils gain at least one qualification and the proportion gaining at least five A*- G grades at GCSE is average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Younger pupils in particular have a clear sense of belonging to the school community. They are developing sound moral and spiritual understanding, for example, through assemblies. Pupils prepare satisfactorily for life in multicultural Britain and are developing an understanding of cultural differences. Pupils usually behave well in lessons, but a small minority of pupils sometimes disrupt learning, and negative attitudes to learning persist amongst lower attaining pupils. Generally, pupils enjoy coming to school and older pupils are particularly happy about their option subjects. The good curriculum has contributed to the maintenance of satisfactory attendance levels. Pupils are much less enthusiastic about the proportion of lessons in which they are overly passive and where the purpose of a task is not explained. Pupils behave sensibly and safely in practical areas such as physical education, science and technology, but the dining hall is sometimes overcrowded and this makes younger pupils feel uncomfortable. Pupils agree that there is little bullying and what there is, is dealt with effectively. The school promotes healthy living satisfactorily, and pupils themselves are aware of the importance of eating healthily and taking exercise, but many only have time and opportunity at breaks to eat fast food snacks. Pupils are keen to take advantage of the many good opportunities to take responsibility in the school community and are involved in charity work. Pupils think the school listens to their views well. The school council is well regarded by pupils and staff alike. It has been behind some sensible improvements to catering and toilet facilities. Pupils are satisfactorily prepared for life beyond school. An adult literacy programme has boosted important skills so that broadly average numbers of pupils gain at least five A*- C grades including useful literacy and mathematics.

Workrelated learning is satisfactory. The school has correctly recognised the need to promote the development of enterprise skills further.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Although some good and outstanding lessons were seen, in too many less effective lessons, time was wasted and progress for some pupils was too slow. In these weaker lessons pupils were often required to copy down learning objectives and outcomes and this made inefficient use of their time. For some lower attaining pupils who find writing difficult, this was unfair. Pupils said that quite often outcomes are written 'just for the sake of it' and that the purpose of activities is not made clear. In contrast, little time is then given to evaluating how well these objectives have been met and how these contribute to pupils achieving their targets. In Year 11 there is more evidence that teachers are clarifying how pupils can achieve their target grades. There was little evidence of tasks designed to support the lowest ability pupils and stretch the most able within each class. Displays around the school remind pupils about the need to behave well but there is generally insufficient emphasis on achievement. These weaknesses in teaching are the main reasons why negative attitudes to learning persist, particularly amongst low attaining pupils, and why they make slow progress. In the best lessons, teachers and pupils share responsibility for learning, with teachers providing inspirational role models. In such lessons, pupils are encouraged to assess their own and each other's work and have a clear understanding of how to improve. They enjoy a variety of active tasks, which are appropriately challenging, resulting in a demonstration of clear progress during the lesson. Currently, not enough effective action is taken to ensure this becomes consistent whole-school practice. In addition, pupils have insufficient opportunity to evaluate their own work and that of others.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A wide range of courses is offered, which are well matched to pupils' needs and capabilities. The Year 7 nurture group curriculum effectively eases the transition from primary schools for pupils with learning difficulties. The school's innovative approach to introducing some options in Year 9 allows them to sample a wider range of subjects. The school gives careful guidance over subject choices for Year 10, providing a good range of academic and vocational courses both in school and at college, as well as alternative programmes to suit pupils with learning difficulties. Provision for the development of literacy is satisfactory. Good adaptations are made to improve the literacy of pupils with learning difficulties but for other pupils provision is patchy. Personal development and careers education is effective but there are weaknesses in the monitoring of progress in citizenship. Extra-curricular opportunities for pupils to pursue their interests through subject clubs, sports teams, music groups and educational visits, support the taught curriculum well. The school provides good opportunities for pupils to experience work largely through developments associated with its specialist status. Specialist status has resulted in the better use of technology, for instance the extensive use of online learning by pupils has contributed to the improved examination results for higher attaining pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral care is good and pupils are well cared for. They say that there is always someone to turn to if they feel upset or troubled. All safety and child protection policies and procedures are in place. Pupils with learning difficulties receive good support through a wide range of expertise. The school makes good use of all support agencies, and its own resources, to make sure that its most vulnerable pupils have the best of care and support in lessons. Until recently, the school has not had a system in place to respond to the progress made by all pupils. In recent years, most interventions have related to pupils with learning difficulties and poor behaviour. The school keeps extensive records of pupils' progress and the intervention panel is now starting to extend support to underachieving pupils of all abilities. This is at an early stage of development so its worth is largely unproven. Guidance given to pupils by their teachers' marking of their work is inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

School leaders have improved the quality of education in a number of areas. Most notably, behaviour is now acceptable and there are strengths in how it is managed. Following consultation with pupils, there have been improvements made to the learning environment. Staff retention and recruitment has improved. Restructuring has resulted in staff being more focused on raising standards. The school works well with a wide range of partners to improve provision further and ensure good care of pupils. Satisfactory whole-school systems for monitoring, self-evaluation and action-planning for improvement have been established. Some leaders and managers have a clear vision and set straightforward directions for improvement but there have been delays in improvements to teaching. A clearly written school improvement plan sets out current and future priorities. However, some targets are not linked to improved outcomes for all pupils and this contributes to inconsistencies across the school. The school sets challenging targets at Key Stage 4 but there is insufficient challenge in the Key Stage 3 targets. Targets are not used consistently well enough to ensure all pupils' achievement is at least satisfactory. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body is aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and receives regular reviews of the school improvement plan. However, governors have not ensured that the school's strategic vision is sufficiently focused on the achievement of all pupils. On a day-to-day basis, there is effective stewardship of resources and financial management is good, but in view of its overall effectiveness, the school does not yet provide satisfactory value for money.

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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?	4
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?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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	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?	4
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?	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
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	4
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	4
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

- 3 November 2007 Dear Pupils Dorcan Technology College, Swindon SN3 5DA Thank you for making us welcome in your school during the recent inspection. The pupils we interviewed deserve a special mention because they provided us with important insights about the school that helped us to reach our judgements. Although there are several things that the school does well, we do not think that you receive a good enough standard of education. As a result, we have given it a Notice to Improve. An inspector will return to check progress next year and then the school will be re-inspected in about a year's time. These are some of the things the school does well:
 - Some of you in the top and in many middle sets are making better progress and achieving satisfactorily. As a result, some GCSE results are improving.
 - Some good and outstanding teaching spread throughout the school is helping you to make faster progress in those lessons.
 - Your behaviour has improved and is now satisfactory.
 - The curriculum is good so that older pupils in particular are on courses they enjoy.
 - The school listens to your ideas and responds well to these. These are the things the school needs to improve:
 - Improve teaching so that less time is wasted in lessons and more attention is given to reviewing what you have learnt and how this links to your targets.
 - Improve the progress of those pupils in lower sets by ensuring all the work of the school focuses on all of you achieving challenging targets in every year group. Your headteacher has indicated that these weaknesses will be addressed quickly. You can help by doing all you can to achieve the targets you have and continuing to share your views about how the school should improve further. I wish you all the best for the future. Yours sincerely Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B



14 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of New Horizons School, St Leonards on Sea, TN38 9JU

You made us most welcome when we inspected your school recently. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you. Thank you for telling us so much about what you do and like at school.

We think that your school is satisfactory and improving with some good features. It provides you with a satisfactory education. We think that you have a good headteacher and we know you have good relationships with everyone who helps and cares for you so well. We can see that most of you are working hard to improve your behaviour and that your progress in your subjects and in your personal development is satisfactory. We know that your teachers do a sound job in helping you learn, asking interesting questions that you like answering, but you told us that you think you could work harder. We know that you are looked after well, although many of you do not know your learning targets or how to improve your work because you told us. We also know you enjoy the good activities provided for you including sport, art, and information and communication technology (ICT). We can see that older pupils are doing well in their examinations, enjoy work related learning and are looking forward to their future beyond school. Although most of you come to school regularly we know that a few of you do not and this needs to improve.

There are four things we have asked the school to do to make it even better:

- ensure your teachers work with you to improve your writing
- to make sure that staff look at and assess how well you are learning to see how you can make better progress
- to make sure you know your learning targets and what you need to do to improve
- to work with the parents and the pupils who do not come to school often enough, so they will return and have better opportunities when they leave school.

I hope you continue to do well in the future.

Judi Bedawi
Lead inspector