

## De Ferrers Specialist Technology College

### Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	124442
<b>Local Authority</b>	Staffordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	328142
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 October 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Rashida Sharif HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1922
Sixth form	292
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	R Fraser
<b>Headteacher</b>	M A York
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 November 2005
<b>School address</b>	St Mary's Drive Burton-on-Trent DE13 0LL
<b>Telephone number</b>	01283 239936
<b>Fax number</b>	01283 239950

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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

De Ferrers is a large comprehensive college on a split site catering for a full range of students aged 11 to 18. It serves both rural and urban areas and achieved its specialist status in technology in September 2001 and again in 2005. Just over 9% of the students are entitled to free school meals, which is below the national average. A small number of the 13.2% of students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds have English as an additional language. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

De Ferrers is a vibrant and dynamic specialist technology college that has improved considerably since the last inspection. The active involvement of the staff, governors and students in all aspects of the life and work of the college is impressive. Staff share a sense of purpose and are highly committed to the college's values, its innovative approach to leadership and management at all levels, and a curriculum that meets the needs of all students. The college provides excellent care, guidance and support for the students and, as a result, they feel very well supported and valued. The comment of one student that, 'staff are kind and helpful, strict but fair', was typical of many others. Similarly, parents commented favourably on the college's work, many citing examples of the dedication of the college staff at all levels.

The proportion of students reaching the expected levels in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11 is above the national average and the progress they make is good. The proportion of students gaining the equivalent of five or more GCSE grades A\* to C has steadily risen since the last inspection to 68%, as shown by the college's most recent results, clearly indicating the good progress students make during their time at the college. This good progress continues in the sixth form. These improvements have been influenced considerably by the college's innovative approach to both the curriculum and teaching. The college offers a rich and varied curriculum that provides a wide range of vocational and academic options for the students. This is matched by some creative teaching based on identifying and meeting the needs of individual students. The range of extra-curricular activities offered to all students, many reflecting the college's specialist status in technology, widens the students' horizons and helps raise their aspirations and improve achievement.

The inspirational leadership of the principal pervades the college and its work at all levels. His commitment, energy and a strongly innovative approach to leadership and management, the curriculum and teaching and learning make things happen. This commitment to improving the overall education for all students is shared by both his senior and middle leadership teams and the governing body. The senior leadership team vigorously tackles any weaknesses in teaching. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is good and there are excellent opportunities for the continued professional development of staff at all levels. Governors, too, discharge their responsibilities with diligence and have the same strong belief in their approach to college improvement and they are highly effective.

The college is justifiably regarded as highly successful in its specialism of technology. The impact of its specialist status is felt throughout the institution and the substantial investment made in new technology has made a very significant contribution to increasing the opportunities and raising the achievement of all students. The college has used its specialist status very effectively to drive its focus on personalised learning forward. Equally importantly, the college has used its staffing and other resources to enhance the provision in local primary schools significantly. As a result of these initiatives, it provides excellent value for money and is well placed to develop a second specialism in modern foreign languages and has an outstanding capacity to improve.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 1**

De Ferrers is fast becoming a popular sixth form college with a significant majority of the students staying on to the sixth form to complete their chosen courses. Students receive excellent guidance and support from the college to ensure that they make informed choices, which appropriately meet personal, academic and aspirational needs. They have a wide range of courses to choose from including the recently introduced International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, AS and A levels, vocational courses and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC). Teaching and learning and the overall achievement of students in the sixth form is good. Pass rates at AS and A levels are above average. Students also make good progress in their vocational courses. Students in the sixth form make a significant, positive contribution to both the college and the wider community through, for example, fund raising for charities and supporting younger learners as peer mentors.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

Ensure that all teaching and learning is consistently good or outstanding with lessons that are exciting, engaging and challenging.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Students enter the college in Year 7 with levels of attainment that are broadly in line with the national average. Achievement is good and standards are above average in Key Stages 3 and 4. Standards improve steadily and, by the end of Year 11, they are above the national average. Students gain knowledge, skills and understanding at a good rate and the percentage obtaining five or more GCSE A\* – C grades has increased since the last inspection. The college's most recent data show that the examination results in 2008 are an improvement on previous years with 68% of its students gaining the equivalent of five A\* to C grades at GCSE overall and 54% achieving 5 A\* to C, including English and mathematics. However, science continues to be an area of concern, especially for middle ability students, which the college is taking measures to address. Nevertheless, the overall examination results indicate an upward trend. This is, in part, due to the college offering an increasing range of appropriate courses and the impact of successful intervention strategies by staff at all levels. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The strong relationships in the college reflect a high level of mutual respect and collaboration. Students feel safe and valued. They have a very good understanding of healthy eating, and participate well in the impressive range of extra-curricular sporting activities. They are also actively involved in whole-college productions and music festivals, which successfully promote community spirit and a sense of belonging. Many students are involved in initiatives that raise funds for charities for both the local and international communities. For example, students raised over £1,300 for deaf students in the Gambia. Incidents of bullying are rare and students know who to go to if they need any help. A small minority of parents expressed a concern over behaviour but the inspectors found it to be exemplary.

Students are considerate towards each other and behave well in lessons and around the college. Where students do not meet the college's high expectations, a range of strategies is used to help and guide them.

Attendance is good. The student council is actively involved in the life of the college securing a number of developments, including a canopy for all weather conditions, additional snack trolleys', benches, blinds in classrooms and the use of tennis courts at breaks. Respect for their environment is evident in the flourishing garden developed on the Dove campus. Students are prepared well for their future economic well-being through a well-organised work experience programme, allied to a wide range of alternative education provision, interview opportunities and vocational courses. The strong emphasis which the college places on academic achievement, including the development of good literacy and numeracy skills, enhances this preparation. These excellent practices operate at both key stages and continue into the sixth form where students provide very good role models as mentors and are actively involved in supporting their younger peers and those who are vulnerable.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The good quality of teaching and learning contributes to the good progress students make. Arrangements for grouping the students operate flexibly to ensure that their needs are fully met. Teachers have good subject knowledge and collaborate very well in sharing ideas and practice. Lessons have a variety of interesting activities and these are well matched to students' needs. The pace in most lessons is brisk and students are attentive learners. In most of the good lessons, teachers plan well, setting clear aims for their lessons, sharing these with students, and help them to monitor their own progress. Students are well aware of their targets and understand how to improve the standard of their work. Although written work is marked conscientiously, this is not consistent across all subjects and teachers. Too many teachers' comments relate to targets set, and the advice given is not specific enough to help students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to further improve their work. The less successful lessons rely too heavily on teachers' input and make insufficient demands of the students. Often, in these lessons, teachers do not use questioning skilfully enough to extend students' knowledge and understanding.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum has improved significantly since the last inspection and is designed to meet the distinctive needs of different groups of students. All statutory requirements are met. An outstanding curriculum is constructed around the college's innovative personalised learning agenda that sets out to meet the needs of individual students. In Year 7, students benefit from being placed in smaller groups with additional help and expertise to meet the needs of those who find learning a challenge. Higher attaining students follow an accelerated programme in Years 7, 8 and 9 which prepares them to take some national tests early within a 'condensed curriculum' enabling them to go on to study additional subjects in Years 9, 10 and 11. The varied curriculum provides students at all levels with a challenging and enjoyable experience of learning. The vocational courses offered make a very significant contribution to the overall achievement of students. These courses allow students to personalise their curriculum and

meet their individual needs and aspirations. A significant number of Year 10 and 11 students opt for vocational courses and many continue these studies into the sixth form. In the sixth form, a newly established International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme offers even wider opportunities. The college offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities including a range of sports, instrumental ensembles, drama and other clubs. The residential programme helps with induction into the college at Key Stage 3 and 5, building confidence and social skills which further benefit learning and enjoyment in lessons.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Provision for care, guidance and support is outstanding. The college is friendly, inclusive and sets a high priority on developing the whole student. College health advisors, a strong personal development programme, and theme days addressing such issues as drugs awareness and being healthy, guide and support the students effectively. The college's mentoring scheme is highly valued by younger students and those older students who act as mentors. Staff know their students well, individual needs are carefully and rigorously identified and support is personalised. The links with primary schools and parents are enhanced by an innovative integration programme, which starts as early as Year 5. Staff support all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities very well. The college has very good links with outside agencies who work very closely with the college to fully meet the specific educational and personal needs of students. All statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding are fully met.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

The principal provides outstanding leadership and direction to the college. He is ably supported by the senior leadership and management team. The college's clear vision and innovative approach to the curriculum and personalised learning are very strongly focused on improvements at all levels. This is well recognised by parents and students who appreciate the very strong and positive college ethos that promotes academic success and personal and social development in all students. The principal, together with governors and staff, constantly strives to improve standards. Major strategic changes since the last inspection have had a very good impact on improvement and raising staff and students' expectations. The college's self-evaluation is accurate because it is based on consistent and regular monitoring of teaching and learning, and robust and systematic analysis of students' academic performance, behaviour and attendance. The college's contribution to community cohesion is at least good in all major respects and the college has a clear understanding of what is required to promote community cohesion. However, this aspect is not as rigorously evaluated as other aspects of the college's work. The professional development of all staff is excellent. Consequently, subject leaders and other teachers are fast developing strengths of the college, which is leading to improvement in the quality of teaching and greater rigour in monitoring and evaluating that provision. The college has been particularly successful in developing its curriculum and teaching to meet the individual needs of its students. It has also been successful in developing and making good use of its non-teaching staff who play a valuable part in supporting students with specific needs. The highly committed and long-standing governors make an excellent contribution to the college and ensure that legal requirements are fully met. They play a key role in strategic development by working closely with the senior staff to regularly refocus the college's vision

and identify the priorities for future development. The college is very well resourced and accommodation is maintained to a high standard. The new sports facilities are impressive. The college's capacity for continued improvement is excellent.



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

## Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	1
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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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**

10 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of De Ferrers Specialist Technology College, Burton-on-Trent, DE13 0LL

On behalf of the inspection team, I should like to thank you for the help you gave us when we visited your college recently. We very much enjoyed meeting you and were very impressed by your courtesy and your positive views of college life. We would particularly like to thank those students who gave up their lunchtime to speak with us.

We think you are right to be proud of De Ferrers. It is an outstanding college. It does everything well and many aspects of its work are excellent. In particular, there is an impressive range of activities in and out of lessons and it was good to see that so many of you take an active part in these. We certainly saw the impressive new sports hall, which you are already beginning to make a very good use of. The college works extremely hard to help you make progress in different subjects and that is why so many of you achieve well. It also provides many opportunities for you to take responsibility and learn to work with others. As a result, we think you are developing as responsible and considerate future citizens. The college supports and cares for you very well; staff check your progress closely and you have a very clear understanding of what you need to do to improve. Most of you are ambitious to do well and work hard in lessons. We know that more of you are deciding to stay on to the sixth form because of the range of choices that are made available for you. We know that some of the parents raised some concern about the behaviour of a small minority of students but you told us that the college takes prompt action when this occurs. Certainly, we noticed how calm and orderly the college is. We were very impressed by your excellent behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the college.

Mr York is one of the reasons your college is outstanding. He is absolutely committed to the college and is very determined to keep making De Ferrers even better. His enthusiasm and energy inspire the staff and motivate everyone to do their best. We found teaching to be good overall but we think it could be even better and have asked everyone to work on this and make sure that your lessons are even more exciting, engaging and challenging. Whatever your interests, we hope you keep working hard and aiming high and continue to take an active part in the life of the college. Congratulations to you all for helping the college to become so successful.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif Her Majesty's Inspector