

Samuel Ward Arts and Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124852
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328233
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Lindsay Hebditch HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	847
Sixth form	185
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr B Shepstone
Headteacher	Mr Howard Lay
Date of previous school inspection	19 October 2005
School address	Chalkstone Way Haverhill Suffolk CB9 0LD
Telephone number	01440 761511
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Age group	13–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Samuel Ward Arts and Technology College is a medium sized upper school which draws its students from a mixed catchment area, including some areas of significant deprivation in the town of Haverhill in Suffolk. The standards of pupils entering the school are below average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is low and the percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need is close to the national average. The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds. The school achieved specialist status in technology in 2000, Arts and English in 2005 and Applied Learning (Vocational) in 2006. Some 50 children attend a playgroup which is situated in the school but operates independently from it.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It provides an excellent learning environment in which students feel safe and valued. The school genuinely puts the needs of learners first, as illustrated by its excellent work on developing the student voice, but students are also well aware of what the boundaries are, and respect them. Parents praise the high quality of education and the constant drive to improve standards still further and inspectors agree with them.

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. His clear vision has been communicated effectively to staff at all levels, making improvement at the school a real team effort. The headteacher receives excellent support from his senior leadership team and enjoys the confidence of the well-informed and highly committed governors.

Students enter the school with below average standards but by the time they complete Key Stage 4 their standards are above average. This excellent progress is achieved through a combination of consistently good teaching and outstanding care, guidance and support. Academic guidance is excellent and there are secure systems to monitor the progress of students against their challenging targets. Work is marked regularly and accurately but teachers' comments provide students with more guidance on how to improve in some subjects than others. There are particularly effective systems to support the most vulnerable students, particularly if they face difficulties with their learning. The curriculum is outstanding and there are excellent opportunities to follow vocational courses at Key Stage 4. The school's development of personalised learning programmes is a significant strength.

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students thoroughly enjoy school and are involved in all aspects of its development. They take an active role in the community at school, local, national and global levels, raising money for a wide variety of worthy causes, including McMillan Nurses and the Bone Marrow Trust. Students behave in a safe manner and make healthy choices with regard to diet and physical activity. Behaviour is excellent and attendance is good. Incidents of bullying are rare and students report that if they do occur they are dealt with quickly. Highly effective careers advice and good awareness of local and national financial enterprise effectively prepare students for their excellent future economic well-being.

The school has made excellent progress since the last inspection and successfully addressed its areas for improvement. The school's specialisms have been used well to share good practice in teaching and curriculum development through the operation of its three 'learning schools'. Capacity to improve is outstanding. Self-evaluation is comprehensive and secure, and together with the school's rigorous quality assurance provides a reliable framework for planning. The school provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is good and improving. Students enter the sixth form with below average standards yet achieve results in A level examinations that are similar to national figures. This represents good progress. Standards have improved since the last inspection. The vast majority of students successfully complete their courses and are well equipped to follow their career and higher education ambitions. The quality of teaching is good and at its best is lively and challenging. Students are very responsive to this, have extremely positive attitudes to learning

and are keen to succeed. Systems for checking on students' academic progress are much improved and are now good. Students value the opportunities they are given to voice their opinions and take responsibility. Inspectors agree with them that, although the curriculum provides good opportunities to develop and extend learning, there are insufficient opportunities for them to participate in sporting activities. Students develop into confident and mature adults who set a positive example for the whole school. They enjoy being in the sixth form and are proud of their school. Leadership and management of the sixth form is effective and provides outstanding support for students' personal development and well-being. The number of students who choose to stay on in the sixth form is increasing steadily. Sixth form accommodation is satisfactory but noise from the communal area sometimes distracts students in adjoining classrooms.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement the school's assessment policy consistently in the way students' work is marked.
- Provide more opportunities for students in the sixth form to participate in sports.
- Reduce noise disruption in the sixth form block.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Attainment of students on entry is below average in English, mathematics and science. Results in the tests at the end of Key Stage 3 reveal that, although standards remain below average, students make excellent progress in relation to their starting points. Students continue to make progress in Key Stage 4 so that the proportion of students gaining five or more grades A* to C at GCSE including English and mathematics is higher than the national figure, and improving at a faster rate. Girls make excellent progress throughout the school. A minority of boys in 2006 did not make the progress expected of them at Key Stage 4, but the school's most recent test results demonstrate that the progress made by boys has improved significantly and is now closer to that of girls. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress because of the school's highly effective procedures for accurately assessing their starting points, providing learning support when it is needed and in the most appropriate way. The few students of minority ethnic backgrounds make similar progress to White British students. The school has an excellent record of meeting its targets for specialist status, and frequently exceeds them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students' behaviour is excellent and their attitude to learning is extremely positive. Students describe the school as 'a really good place to learn'. They thoroughly enjoy coming to school and feel that they are treated like adults. One Year 10 girl said, 'We work together with the staff. Teachers really want us to learn.' Incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with quickly and effectively. Attendance has improved since the last inspection, has exceeded the school's own target and is now good. Exclusions are rare. Students clearly understand the importance of healthy eating and the benefits of physical exercise. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students takes a high priority in the school and is evident in students' consideration for more vulnerable students and their extensive charity work in the local community, together with an increasing number of national and global initiatives. There is a strong, elected school council, members of which

participate with staff in interviews for teaching posts. Some school council members have also been trained in classroom observation. The citizenship programme, designed to develop and strengthen students' self-awareness and awareness of the world, is comprehensively planned and well received. The programme for placing Year 10 students in two-week long work placements helps to prepare them well for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are consistently good. The most successful lessons challenge and inspire students. They have clear learning objectives, are well paced, and have varied and interesting activities to which students respond with enthusiasm. Current Year 9 students are enjoying a cross-curricular project between the history, music, and information and communication technology (ICT) departments in which Billy Joel's song 'We didn't start the fire' is used as a vehicle to illustrate to students that history is a part of personal identity. It also allows them to place themselves within the context of their own time and environment. The music lessons provide the opportunity for students to write and record their own soundtracks and ICT lessons allow classes to create videos to accompany their verses. As a result of such effective teaching strategies students produce work of very high quality and this is reflected in their steadily improving standards. Teachers' expectations of students in lessons are generally high. They make effective use of assessment data to ensure the level of challenge is appropriate to students' abilities. Students' work is marked regularly, but whilst they are generally given helpful advice on their completed work so that they know how to improve, in a few instances this practice is not implemented consistently. Students who find learning difficult are well supported in lessons. Teaching assistants know the students well and make effective contributions to their learning in class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum which effectively meets the needs of all students and makes an extremely positive contribution to their progress. This is particularly evident in the Key Stage 4 curriculum which is focused on personalised learning. There are clear pathways that allow students to follow their preferred combination of academic and vocational subjects. Facilities such as a fully equipped hairdressing salon allow students to gain NVQ qualifications alongside more traditional GCSEs. The school has used its specialist arts and technology status well to increase opportunities for students to work in teams and to develop leadership skills. Through its specialisms, the school has also built an impressive range of links with other institutions and training providers which are used well to broaden opportunities for students. An excellent range of sporting, social and cultural extra-curricular activities add greatly to students' enjoyment of school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and have a significant impact on underpinning improvements in student progress. Students enjoy strong, trusting relationships with their teachers. A wide range of highly committed staff from within the school, including three full-time

inclusion officers, offer outstanding pastoral care and support to individual students. The school works with a comprehensive network of external agencies to provide more specialised support when it is needed. The school has strong systems in place to track the progress of students and provide quick and effective support for any students whose progress shows signs of slipping.

Support for vulnerable students is excellent and the outstanding provision for students with additional learning difficulties helps them maintain their excellent progress. Arrangements for health and safety are secure and there are effective procedures for safeguarding students that meet current government requirements. Parents are kept well informed of progress and their attendance at student review days is high.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership of the headteacher is exemplary. He has ensured that the school operates within a clear set of values which have student learning at their heart. His clear vision for the school is communicated effectively to all staff so that improvement at the school is a real team effort. Honest and rigorous self-evaluation procedures are shared across the school. The school has not shirked its responsibility to make changes to its staffing arrangements in order to improve subject management and teaching and learning when required but has consistently maintained high morale throughout the school. There is a readiness amongst staff to adopt new and improved practices. The talented senior leadership team works extremely effectively with middle managers to ensure that improvements are delivered quickly when needed. The creation of the innovative 'learning schools' has had a significant impact on school performance. They are very well managed and provide a strong curriculum focus, particularly for the school's specialisms in arts, technology and applied learning, and provide the school with a source of effective and reliable quality assurance. The school's status as a training school for student teachers has contributed to its excellent staff training provision, benefiting teachers and support staff who have a key role in tutoring students.

The leadership team works successfully to create an inclusive school community that integrates students from both the town and nearby rural communities. All students feel equally valued and achieve well. Taken with the extensive community links and excellent citizenship education, the school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. Governors know the school well and ensure that all aspects of school business are monitored rigorously, properly evaluated, and that legal requirements are met. They are not prepared for the school to rest on its laurels, and work closely with senior staff to set challenging targets for the future. Value for money 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	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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	1	

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	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?	1	
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**

19 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Samuel Ward Arts and Technology College, Suffolk, CB9 0LD

Thank you very much for making us so welcome at your school. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you work. You clearly enjoy coming to school and appreciate all of the hard work that your teachers put in. In the lessons we saw you were working hard as well. Lots of your parents took the trouble to complete the questionnaires we sent out and I would be grateful if you could pass on our thanks to them for taking the trouble to reply. Your parents are as happy with the school as you are.

We agree with you that your school is outstanding and can fully understand why you are so proud of it. The headteacher works very hard to make sure that you all do well at school and your teachers make your lessons as interesting and enjoyable as they can.

Your headteacher is keen to make the school even better. We identified three things that we think would help.

- Make sure that all of your teachers provide detailed comments on your work so that you know how to improve.
- Provide more opportunities for students in the sixth form to participate in sports.
- Reduce the amount of noise in the sixth form block so that students can study properly.

Your continued excellent behaviour and hard work will support the school's efforts. I wish you all the very best for the future. Well done!

Lindsay Hebditch

Her Majesty's Inspector