

Walker Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108525
Local Authority	Newcastle Upon Tyne
Inspection number	337099
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Ann Wallis

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1186
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	140
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Wood
Headteacher	Dr Steve Gater
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 35 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's planning, analysis of examination results, student tracking data and other documents. They also analysed 35 parent and 115 student questionnaires.

- how successful leaders and managers have been in improving students' achievement across the school in subjects which have performed less well in the past, particularly mathematics and religious education
- the quality of teaching across the school, particularly how well work is matched to students' needs and how good the advice is that they receive on how to improve their work
- the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the quality of care, guidance and support.

Information about the school

This is an above average sized school serving an area of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. A below average proportion of students are from minority ethnic groups and an average proportion speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average, as is the number entitled to free school meals. The school has dual specialist status in technology and visual arts.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Walker Technology College is a satisfactory school with many good features. It is well regarded by parents, students and the community it serves. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Self-evaluation is effective and senior leaders have identified appropriate priorities for improvement which are helping to bring about satisfactory and steadily improving outcomes for students. Hence the school has a satisfactory and growing capacity to improve. The school has particular strengths in the following aspects of its work:

- it is an inclusive school which values the skills and talents of all students and provides them with good care, guidance and support
- the curriculum is particularly well matched to students' needs with a wide range of courses on offer to suit students of all aptitudes and abilities
- students' personal development is at the heart of the school's work and consequently students say they feel safe, know how to adopt a healthy lifestyle and have a clear sense of right and wrong
- students are keen to take responsibility and contribute to the community; for example, large numbers of students enjoy belonging to the Combined Cadet Force and are successful in gaining a Public Uniform Services qualification
- its outstanding arrangements for ensuring the safety of students
- the school's specialist status and the good partnerships it forges with other organisations support students' achievement and personal development well.

Although the percentage of students who gain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE declined after the last inspection, outcomes for students have shown steady improvement in most respects over the last two years. The proportion of students who achieve five or more GCSE grades C or above including English and mathematics is improving but remains low. However, given students' low starting points when they enter the school their learning, progress and achievement are satisfactory. Attainment and achievement in mathematics have been well below that in English. The school has recognised this weakness and senior leaders have taken successful measures to remedy this problem so standards in mathematics are now rising. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities have made slower progress than their peers in the past but this gap has now narrowed and their progress is satisfactory.

Teaching is satisfactory overall. In some lessons teaching is good and is enabling students to make good progress. There is good practice across a number of subject areas, for example English, art and technology, where teachers plan well-structured lessons and deliver these at a lively pace. Lessons generally engage students so they want to learn but there are sometimes insufficient opportunities for students to assess

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their own work and learn independently. Assessment data is not yet used consistently to match work to students' needs. Although there are examples of good practice, particularly in English, students do not always receive written feedback of sufficiently good quality for them to know how to improve further.

Attendance is low and despite the school's strenuous efforts there remain a number of persistent non-attenders. However, for many students, attendance is now improving. The school recognises the need for further work with parents and carers, feeder schools and outside agencies to improve attendance.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further by ensuring that learning and progress are consistently good across a wider range of subjects, including mathematics.
- Ensure that attendance improves by further strengthening links with parents and carers, feeder schools and outside agencies to reduce the percentage of students who are persistently absent.
- Improve the quality of teaching across the school by sharing best practice to ensure that:
 - - assessment data is used more consistently so work is closely matched to students' needs
 - - students receive regular written feedback on their work which is constructive and helps them to know exactly what they need to do to move from one level to the next
 - - students are encouraged to be involved more actively in their learning, to assess their own performance and to learn independently.
- About 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students' achievement is satisfactory and most enjoy learning. Although past examination results indicate attainment is low, standards are steadily improving. The proportion of students gaining five GCSE grades at A* to C including English and mathematics increased by 10% to 31% in 2008 and this level was maintained in 2009. In lessons, all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, were seen to be making at least satisfactory and often good progress. Scrutiny of students' work, the school's own analysis of recent examination results, and their most recent tracking data all confirmed this view.

Classes are well managed and students' behaviour in lessons is satisfactory. Students show respect for each other and their teachers and they behave well as they move around the school in a safe and orderly way. Their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good and is supported by a wide range of partnerships, local and overseas visits and links with other schools and organisations. In addition to team

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working and enterprise activities, students develop satisfactory basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology to prepare them for future employment.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory but not enough teaching is consistently good or better across all subjects. Where teaching is good, students are given opportunities to assess their own work and teachers set interesting tasks which enable students to work independently. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and manage students' behaviour well so little learning time is wasted.

The good and improving curriculum is well organised and provides a broad range of experiences which meet students' needs well. Improvements to the curriculum are contributing to students' rising attainment and their improving levels of attendance. It has been adjusted to allow higher attaining students to take examinations early and also provides courses which meet the needs of the lowest attaining students who may be at risk of disaffection. The school boasts the fastest growing cadet contingent in the

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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country and a highly successful football academy.

The care, guidance and support provided for students are good and are strengths of the school. There are very strong links in place with a range of outside agencies to support vulnerable students, those who are looked after and those whose first language is not English. Transition arrangements are good so students are well prepared for entry to the school and also for the sixth form, college or the world of work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers embed ambition and drive improvement satisfactorily. The headteacher provides experienced leadership and is well supported by a recently restructured senior team. Leaders, managers and governors have suitably high expectations of staff and students, which is helping to bring about steady improvements in teaching and learning and in attainment and achievement, particularly in weaker subjects such as mathematics. Recently improved systems for tracking the progress of individuals and groups of students, such as those with special educational needs, are contributing to better use of data to identify any underachievement. The new system of 'mini-schools' within the main school, where individual tutors and senior leaders have a clearer input into guiding and tracking students' academic progress, has not had time to impact fully on attainment and achievement.

There are excellent measures in place to ensure that the school does its utmost to safeguard students. Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are becoming increasingly involved in challenging it to improve further. Leaders and managers have a very good understanding of the local community and have been successful in promoting community cohesion both locally and further afield through links with, for example, communities in Morocco and Costa Rica. The school has a very inclusive ethos and any gaps in achievement between groups of students are identified and concerted efforts are made to close them.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3

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The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

This is an inclusive sixth form where all students are welcomed and their talents recognised and nurtured. They make satisfactory progress, sometimes from low starting points, and many reach broadly average standards when they leave. Students contribute regularly to the smooth running of their community and develop sensible and mature attitudes. Strengths in teaching include good planning and subject knowledge. However, some lessons are over directed and students become passive recipients rather than independent learners. The curriculum meets the needs of most learners and students speak positively about the good care, guidance and support they receive. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the sixth form and plans are in place to raise students' attainment further.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Most parents who responded to the questionnaire were positive about the education their children receive. A number of parents wrote complimentary comments about the care and support their children receive. A very few parents felt the school did not deal effectively with poor behaviour but inspectors found no evidence to support this view.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Walker Technology College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 35 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1186 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	57	30	43	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	40	58	28	41	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	40	58	28	41	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	40	58	26	38	2	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	38	56	28	41	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	32	46	34	49	4	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	46	30	43	6	9	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	32	46	36	52	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	36	51	32	46	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	36	51	28	40	6	9	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	40	57	30	43	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	40	59	26	38	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	44	64	24	35	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Inspection of Walker Technology College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE6 4BY

Thank you so much for making us welcome when we came to inspect your school this week. We are particularly grateful to those of you who took time to talk with us about your school, tell us your views and fill in our questionnaires. Those of you (115) who filled in questionnaires were very positive about your experience of school.

These are some of the main findings included in our report:

- your learning and progress are satisfactory, although your attainment is low
- you receive good care, guidance and support and follow a good curriculum
- teaching and assessment are satisfactory
- the way in which your school ensures you are kept safe is outstanding
- senior leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of your school and are helping it to improve
- you know how to lead healthy lives and stay safe, many of you are keen to contribute to your school and take responsibility and your behaviour is satisfactory in lessons and good around the school.

This is what we have asked your school to do now:

- raise your attainment further by ensuring that your learning and progress are consistently good across the school, including in mathematics
- ensure that your attendance improves further
- improve the quality of teaching across the school by sharing the best teaching practice and giving you opportunities to assess your own work and learn independently.

You can help your school improve further by attending regularly and working with your teachers to make even better progress in your learning.

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