

Pent Valley School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118930
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339326
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1345
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Parker
Headteacher	Mario Citro
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 40 lessons involving 38 teachers and cover supervisors, and held meetings with representative governors, staff, groups of students and the school improvement partner. They observed the school's work and looked at planning documents, assessment information, students' work and safeguarding documentation. They also took account of questionnaires from 59 parents and carers, 48 staff and 217 students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the sustainability of the 2009 improvements in GCSE English and mathematics
- the quality of students' learning in lessons
- the impact of the pastoral and mentoring systems and the use of assessment data in promoting students' personal and academic development
- the effectiveness of the actions taken to develop the school's role in the wider community.

Information about the school

Although most of the students in this large school are from White British backgrounds, it is culturally diverse with small numbers from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The main groups are from Eastern European Roma and Nepalese backgrounds, linked to a locally based Gurkha regiment. The proportion speaking English as an additional language is above average, of whom about a quarter are at an early stage of learning English. Eligibility for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is high and mainly relate to behavioural, emotional and social, moderate and specific learning difficulties. The school has technology specialist status and is the lead local school for students with visual impairment, physical disabilities and specific learning difficulties. The school operates in an area where approximately a quarter of students are selected for grammar schools. In September 2008, the school was re-arranged into five mini-schools where students are looked after and taught for most of their lessons.

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

2

Main findings

Under the principled and determined leadership of the headteacher, the school has maintained or improved all aspects of its performance since it was last inspected. Some areas judged to be inadequate then, such as variability in leadership across the school, the curriculum and the contribution students make to the school and the wider community, are now significant strengths. Most notably, improvement has been achieved in raising attainment in English and mathematics and students' overall attainment is boosted by a broader and relevant curriculum for Key Stage 4 students, promoted well by the school's specialist technology status. The improvements already made, together with the opportunities offered by the impending building programme, reflect the school's good capacity for ongoing improvement. Staff morale is high, with all those responding to the questionnaire indicating that they are proud to work at the school. However, the overall effectiveness remains satisfactory because some of the changes made have not had time to ensure consistent learning and progress in lessons. In a small minority of lessons, students did not apply themselves when required to work on their own because they did not find their tasks interesting. This was mostly in lessons for younger students. Overall attainment throughout the main school and in the sixth form is marginally below national averages.

The school has a good awareness of the varying needs of individual students and the groups represented within the school, promoting community cohesion in and beyond the school well. The school cares well for students and they feel safe. Every opportunity is taken to enhance students' personal development. Students respond exceptionally well to initiatives for them to lead healthy lifestyles. For example, all Year 7 students have a school meal and the school has received Food for Life and Healthy School awards in recognition. The specialist status makes an important contribution through food and nutritional technology, and many students have individual exercise plans constructed through the school's leisure centre. Focused individual support helps students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who are visually impaired and those who speak English as an additional language, to achieve well.

School leaders and governors are ambitious to introduce innovative solutions to identified areas where further improvements can be made. They research new ideas rigorously to ensure that initiatives will have the greatest possible impact on students' achievements. When introduced, their impact is evaluated and changes made appropriately. An example is the introduction of mini-schools, which have had a positive effect on students' attitudes and behaviour and leaders realise that more is necessary to improve this further, reflected in a current key priority to develop personal responsibility. There has been considerable success in improving approaches to teaching through a

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rigorous system of mini-school reviews, which in turn inform teachers' professional development. To date, subject leaders have not been sufficiently involved in reviewing teaching and learning to promote the most effective subject approaches.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching from satisfactory to good by:
 - ensuring that lessons are interesting and relevant to students' experiences
 - extending the influence of subject leaders in ensuring consistently good learning and progress and in disseminating good practice within their subjects.
- Improve students' learning and their attitudes to lessons by:
 - developing their skills to work more independently
 - implementing the plan to promote student responsibility by involving them in establishing a school charter.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Although below national averages, students' performance is improving steadily year on year, particularly in the key measure of the proportion of students achieving five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. Results in the early entry GCSEs in English and mathematics show that the school is on track to make further improvements. Students' achievement is satisfactory. They readily participate in the additional lessons provided to boost their performance. They make particularly good progress in the vocational subjects followed in Key Stage 4 where attainment is closer to national averages because students find these more interesting. They also recognise that in these courses they are developing the knowledge and skills which equip them well for their future education or employment. However, younger students do not make such rapid progress because their tasks do not give them similar practical opportunities to be actively involved in their own learning. On these occasions, students chat too much and sometimes do not respond quickly enough when required to listen to the views of their peers. Even in some of the most successful lessons, students are passive in their learning.

Around the school, students' behaviour is orderly so that the playground and public spaces are safe and calm. The organisation into mini-schools gives students a sense of identity and most say that they feel safe and have positive relationships with their teachers and mentors. Senior leaders recognise that the current mentoring arrangements are not wholly consistent and are rightly introducing a 'check in and check out' system to give students more regular access to their mentors. Attendance is average. The school has developed good strategies to encourage regular attendance and, as a result of the robust response to lower attendance in 2009 than had been taken in previous years, attendance has improved.

Relationships between all groups of students are positive and the successful inclusion of students from differing cultures is helping to develop students' understanding of

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diversity. Some mini-schools have developed international links, for example with schools in Nepal and the United States of America. Students' good contribution to the school and the wider community is promoted well through mini-school activities. For example, students influenced the planning for the introduction of mini-schools and contribute to the review of their effectiveness. Students regularly organise charity events. Students in Years 10 and 11 make an excellent contribution to community projects such as path cleaning, beach clearing and some students have established an allotment at a primary school. Students have a positive role in discussing and implementing changes through the school parliament. As part of its drive to promote personal responsibility, the school recognises that there is room for students to have more opportunities to make an input about how they learn. The school actively provides opportunities for students, and increasingly their families, to broaden their experiences and develop other skills. It seeks out those students who do not freely volunteer and puts in innovative interventions to encourage their involvement, for example bicycle mechanics, and often making effective links with opportunities provided through specialist technology status.

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	3
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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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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How effective is the provision?

In the majority of lessons, teachers have high expectations of students and use a range of approaches to engage them and develop their understanding; for example through probing questioning and giving students opportunities to reflect and assess their own work. However, there is inconsistency due to some teachers continuing to develop their own practice, making teaching satisfactory overall. Teachers use data and assessment well to help students understand the quality of their work; many give very clear guidance about how students can improve their work and exactly what they have to do to reach a higher level or grade. Often teachers use this clear understanding of students' abilities and attainment to set work which is well matched to take learning forward effectively. However, in a few lessons, while teachers set work at different levels, whole-class teaching is not well enough focused on the needs of all the students in the class. Students then need a lot of individual support to complete their tasks, resulting in time wasted while students wait for help from their teacher or a teaching assistant.

Curriculum planning for older students is sophisticated, resulting in a highly personalised curriculum that meets the needs of different groups of students, and increasingly of individual students, which assists them in making progress. The emphasis on vocational and technological areas in which there is a high degree of choice is much appreciated by students. The technology specialism has widened the experiences available to students within the subject but has had less impact in other areas of the school. Although there are some innovative approaches to the curriculum for younger students, planning for how this is taught is less well developed. Subject matter is not always well matched to students' experiences, needs and abilities, particularly in project-based learning.

The mini-schools play a key role in ensuring that arrangements for safeguarding are strong. Students are known as individuals and the comprehensive tracking systems are used effectively to provide additional support if a student begins to fall behind. The school works diligently with a range of agencies, including health services, to support vulnerable students. It takes a leading role locally in some sensitive areas such as providing support for teenage fathers and pregnant girls, ensuring that they are able to achieve academically while meeting their responsibilities for their children.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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?

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The headteacher and senior leadership team have channelled the enthusiasm of staff to good effect. For example, the transition to mini-schools has been achieved successfully and middle leaders are effectively managing clear systems, including tracking students' performance and organising additional workshops and catch-up sessions to raise achievement. Governors have a good awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses and systematically check on the progress of key areas, helping senior leaders to evaluate the impact of the changes they make.

Safeguarding records are very well kept and staff are trained and aware of the procedures for child protection. The school has effective ways to gain parents' and carers' views and concerns. Consultations about proposed developments are frequently conducted at school events but also through more personalised opportunities including the termly headteacher's Saturday surgery. Parents' views have been used to influence some school priorities including uniform and site security. Parents and carers are given regular up-to-date information about their child's progress and there are good mechanisms such as guidance booklets for each year group to help parents support learning. The school holds equality of opportunity and overcoming discrimination as central to its work. It meets the needs of different groups within the local community well, meeting with the Nepalese community before students arrived in the school and providing individual programmes for Czech Roma students. Arrangements to provide additional English lessons have significantly improved students' skills and boys' achievement in particular. Other events such as coffee mornings and English lessons for parents ensure that the school plays a full part in promoting community cohesion and integrating different groups within the wider community. The school is a cohesive community, with different groups actively encouraged to integrate and no evidence of friction between them. Occasional racial incidents are dealt with well.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Students make satisfactory progress and their attainment is broadly in line with national averages for the courses followed. Trends over the past three years show year-on-year steady improvement, most pronounced in Year 12 examination results. The curriculum has expanded in recent years so that many students undertake a mix of AS and A-level courses alongside vocational subjects, although too many students study just one or two courses limiting progression beyond the sixth form. These include innovative courses of interest to students and which provide increased flexibility, such as games design. Students' attendance has improved in response to the effective monitoring systems recently introduced, supporting better progress. Teaching incorporates effective use of grade-related criteria to help students make progress in their coursework and teachers successfully encourage appropriate methods of self-assessment. Almost half the students undertake voluntary work in a variety of contexts, such as working in local primary schools or in sports coaching. The sixth form council influences the planning and development of social events such as the 'sixth form prom' and the 'battle of the bands', though students have more limited involvement in whole-school activities. Students appreciate the effective guidance they receive on entry into the sixth form that prepares them for the next phase of their lives. The new management team is developing and leading the sixth form well. Leaders have a clear strategic vision for the current and future development of the sixth form, and have worked hard to make well-considered revisions to the curriculum that now provide a wider range and diversity of courses that meet the needs of students and support their progression to higher level courses, training or employment. The recently implemented tracking systems are effective in identifying low attendance and/or underachievement. Early action is taken to address problems encountered by individual students and there are signs that these new systems are having a positive impact on both attendance and attainment data. The sixth form team has yet to undertake a more comprehensive evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the sixth form.

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	2

Views of parents and carers

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Few parents and carers returned completed questionnaires. About a third of these, a very small proportion of the parental body, expressed negative views, particularly about students' behaviour and how the school takes account of suggestions and concerns. The inspection team found that the school makes strenuous efforts to listen to and act on parental views, for example, by carrying out regular surveys. Most written comments related to individual incidents and concerns about behaviour. Inspectors found that the school addresses incidents of inappropriate behaviour well but that there are a few inattentive students who slow the pace of learning for others.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Pent Valley 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 59 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,345 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	11	19	35	59	10	17	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	13	22	39	66	4	7	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	20	39	66	6	10	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	8	14	33	56	11	19	3	5
The teaching is good at this school	8	14	36	61	11	19	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	15	31	53	9	15	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	14	40	68	5	8	2	3
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)	9	15	34	58	9	15	3	5
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	12	34	58	9	15	3	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	19	22	37	12	20	8	14
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	7	31	53	16	27	3	5
The school is led and managed effectively	8	14	32	54	10	17	4	7
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	22	32	54	5	8	5	8

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



9 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Pent Valley Technology College, Folkestone, CT19 4ED

On behalf of my colleagues, I thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school recently, particularly those who gave up part of your lunchtime.

We found that yours is a satisfactory and improving school. We congratulate you on the higher attainment you are achieving, particularly in examinations. You make satisfactory progress and many of you in Years 10 and 11 are helped to make good progress because of the additional lessons to complete coursework and revise for examinations. Those of you who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or who speak English as an additional language make good progress. However, we think you could do even better and that generally students could work harder when given tasks to do alone or in small groups. We know that this only refers to a few of you, but we are asking that you pay more attention in lessons and chat less so that lessons are not slowed down for others.

You take advantage of all the school offers to keep fit, healthy and safe, such as by taking school meals and using the school leisure facility. You get on well together so that the school is harmonious for you to enjoy one another's company at lunchtime and after-school activities. You make a positive contribution to the school and wider community, for example when older students contribute to community service projects. You can help further by participating fully in the forthcoming consultation about a School Charter and ways to promote personal responsibility.

The school's curriculum gives older students a wide choice of courses to follow. Most of you indicated that you find lessons enjoyable and that they help you to learn, but say that sometimes they are boring. We have asked teachers to think again about how they present work to you to make more lessons good. We have also asked them to share the most effective methods more with one another to help you learn more consistently in lessons.

We wish you every success in the future

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings

Lead inspector

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