

Sponne School Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122051
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	340079
Inspection dates	27–28 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Kevin Sheldrick HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
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	1220
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Eddie Craven
Headteacher	Mr Jamie Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors devoted just over half their time observing lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at documentation relating to planning, monitoring, safeguarding, communications with parents, and parental questionnaires.

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

- the progress different groups of students make, particularly in English and design and technology and what this indicates about all aspects of provision
- the school's explanation for its outcomes since the last inspection and what this suggests about the school's capacity for sustained improvement and how effectively the school promotes equal opportunities
- the extent governors have challenged the school about the progress students make.

Information about the school

This school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is very small. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The school has been a technology college since 1998 and has been awarded the Arts Gold Mark and the Information and Communication Technology Mark. The school gained trust status in 2009.

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

Young people in both the sixth form and the main school are receiving a sound standard of education. Achievement is satisfactory and attainment is consistently above average in most areas. Attendance is high and there are a number of other good outcomes. Students contribute positively to the community in a wide variety of ways and take seriously the student council because it influences decision-making in the school. The good care, support and guidance explain why the large majority of students agree that they feel safe. This aspect of provision also helps ensure students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress at the same rate as other students in the school. The largely traditional curriculum meets the needs of students well, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

Although students experience many good lessons, overall the quality of teaching is satisfactory. In the lessons seen students make better progress in Years 10 and 11 because lessons here are tightly focused on ensuring students achieve their challenging targets. Lower down the school, teaching does not consistently address the needs of students of different abilities. There is not always a sense of urgency in lessons, particularly in classes containing lower attaining students. The large majority of students are polite and behave well.

The school's leaders are strongly supported by parents and students. Rising examination results and strong evidence that the school cares for every individual have resulted in a good reputation locally. The school's monitoring and evaluation are accurate, although they do not always result in improvement. For instance, good practice is not always effectively shared and there are inconsistencies in the guidance given to students about how to improve. Governors strongly influence the strategic direction of the school and are clear about the further improvements required to ensure students make better progress. More recently the school's leaders have made the progress all students make towards challenging targets a higher priority. However, this shift of emphasis is not yet fully embedded across the school. The school development plan does not fully reflect this priority and some middle leaders are a little uncertain about targets. The school has achieved a measure of success in overcoming the barriers to learning for lower attaining boys and in enabling the gifted and talented to shine. This record and the effectiveness of the school's evaluation indicate that the school has a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' progress by ensuring all teaching includes:

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- a clear focus on students' individual challenging targets in every year group
- planned activities to meet the needs of the full ability range
- strategies that enable students to remain focused on their learning at all times
- opportunities in lessons for progress to be reviewed regularly
- marking and effective written guidance on how students can improve their learning.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring:
 - the monitoring of teaching and learning results in consistent effective practice
 - targets for improvement are shared effectively with staff and other partners
 - governors receive timely and accessible updates regarding students' progress.
- About 40% of the 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**

The school has ensured that all groups of students make satisfactory progress. Targeted interventions have increased the numbers of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, particularly when this indicator is considered without the inclusion of English and mathematics. Interventions aimed at gifted and talented students have resulted in a rise in the numbers of students gaining A and A* grades.

The school is effective in ensuring the potentially vulnerable students, including some excluded from other schools, progress well. In lessons, students work steadily and occasionally show enthusiasm for their work. They lack confidence when it comes to improving their work and often rely on teachers for guidance. However, many are able to work independently and take advantage of a first-class learning resource centre. Of those subjects taken by all students, science consistently ensures high attainment because students progress particularly well. Mathematics is usually not far behind but attainment in English and design and technology has been largely average.

Students are well prepared for the future because their attainment is good and they receive effective guidance on the world of work and post-16 education. They also develop important social and group work skills. Students have a very strong sense of right and wrong, a fact reflected in their critical reaction to the negative attitudes occasionally evident in lessons that are less effective. The cultural dimension is less well developed. It is not planned systematically and depends on what teachers introduce in lessons. There are few opportunities for students to interact with groups not represented in the immediate community.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teaching quality is quite varied. Inspectors saw examples of outstanding and good teaching, particularly in the lessons involving older students. Teachers often had very good subject knowledge and an accurate awareness of the levels at which students were working. They planned lessons that met the needs of the full ability range and injected a sense of urgency. In the very best lessons, teachers motivated students to work very hard by providing encouraging feedback and timely reminders of targets. Lessons finished well with students left in no doubt about what they had learnt and what was coming next. Questioning was varied and included strategies to ensure all students had to engage critically with the work. A wide range of activities maintained students' interest, including information and communication technology. Inspectors also saw examples of less effective lessons, including a small number that were inadequate. In these lessons, objectives lacked clarity, activities were not related to students' individual targets and the overall pace was too slow. Students were left unclear as to what they had learnt. Occasionally, off-task behaviour went unchallenged, particularly in classes containing lower attaining students. Some marking was highly effective because it provided clear guidance on how students could achieve their targets. A few examples were seen of students using criteria to evaluate their own progress. Inconsistencies in marking and a lack of focus on individual targets in some lessons, particularly in Years 7 to 9, have resulted in students being unclear about what they must do to improve. The largely academic curriculum is supported by students and parents and is appropriate to the local jobs market. A small vocational offering, developed with other providers, meets the needs of a minority of students. The school has introduced a

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number of changes to the curriculum in Years 7 and 8 so students more systematically develop the skills needed to succeed in the future. Some students are taking courses early where this is appropriate. Information and communication technology skills are developed well throughout the school. The school provides a very wide range of opportunities for students to participate in the expressive arts, a fact recognised in its Artsmark Gold award. The school's 'house' system provides a more individualised curriculum that is lowering exclusions and is helping ensure above average numbers of students gain five or more A* to G grades at GCSE.

The priority all staff give to care, support and guidance ensures this aspect is a strength. The school provided inspectors with impressive evidence of how it has ensured the well-being of students who are potentially vulnerable, including those excluded from other schools. The school's specialism has led to closer relationships with feeder primary schools so students transfer without a hitch at the end of Year 6. Information and guidance are of high quality, particularly those provided for vulnerable and at-risk students. Nevertheless, interventions have not been consistently targeted on all students who are underachieving, in order that they can reach challenging targets.

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?

The leadership of the school's specialism is satisfactory. Although some targets have not been reached, the curriculum has improved and students enthused about the wide range of additional opportunities associated with the school's technology status. The school accurately monitors lessons but is not always successful in addressing the weaknesses. The school is developing an improved approach to the monitoring of students' progress so it can use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of provision and target its interventions better. The school's aim of providing a 'vibrant learning environment that challenges all our students to make good progress' has been recently reflected in the adoption of more challenging targets. Leaders are not ensuring that all lessons, particularly those involving younger and lower attaining students, are enabling all students to reach their targets. Governors are keen to monitor students' progress more rigorously but do not always receive information in an accessible and timely fashion.

The school is gradually bringing more sophistication to its use of assessment information so that it can better monitor all outcomes to ensure equal opportunities. It has taken

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steps to ensure girls have as much opportunity as the boys to undertake physical activity but interventions to ensure all students progress well are not yet sufficiently embedded. All safeguarding regulations and duties are met. Arrangements and policies for safeguarding are in line with government requirements and are systematically reviewed. Staff have been suitably trained and have the skills and expertise required to keep students safe. The school successfully develops students' understanding of risk so they can keep themselves safe. There are strengths in the way the school promotes community cohesion at a local level and international links are developing. The audit of this aspect has not identified the actions needed to promote insight into the communities within the United Kingdom.

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
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	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Students make satisfactory progress and attain standards that are average by the end of the second year of A-level studies. The small minority of students undertaking applied courses make better progress than the majority who undertake traditional A levels. Almost all students complete their courses and progress from the sixth form to their first-choice universities. Attendance and punctuality are above average. Students contribute positively to the life of the main school, for instance by mentoring younger students, and sixth-formers fill the positions of head boy and girl.

The school consistently monitors the progress students make towards their targets. This has been instrumental in the higher outcomes at AS level in 2009. The teaching seen in the sixth form was similar to that observed in Key Stage 4. Most students follow a largely academic curriculum that meets their needs well. The accommodation is a little

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cramped and some students commented on the lack of opportunities to undertake sport. Students indicated that they are happy with the guidance and support they receive about what they should do next.

Leaders have established open lines of communication in the sixth form. Monitoring and evaluation are eliminating inconsistencies so outcomes are improving. Many of the changes are new and are therefore not yet fully embedded.

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

Almost all parents indicate that they are happy with their child's experience at school and think teaching is good. The vast majority of parents think their child is kept safe. Most parents responded positively to all the other statements in the questionnaire, except that a small group of parents disagreed with the statement concerning how effectively the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors found that the school deals well with unacceptable behaviour although there is scope for improving teaching in the small minority of lessons where students are distracted from their work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sponne School 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 276 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1220 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	106	38	152	55	17	6	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	110	40	160	58	4	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	142	51	118	42	14	5	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	114	41	137	49	17	6	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	89	32	169	61	8	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	69	25	164	59	26	9	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	93	33	136	49	11	4	2	1
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)	93	33	136	49	11	4	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	93	33	149	54	22	8	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	89	32	142	51	29	10	1	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	67	24	163	59	19	7	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	129	46	129	46	8	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	142	51	128	46	8	3	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 pupils' 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.



29 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Sponne School Technology College, Towcester, NN12 6DJ

Following the recent inspection of your school, I want to outline some of the main findings. May I also take this opportunity to thank those students we interviewed for their valuable comments that helped to inform the inspection judgements.

We concluded that your school is providing a sound standard of education in the main school and the sixth form. Achievement is satisfactory. Care, guidance and support contribute to your feeling safe and are effective in helping those of you with special educational needs and/or disabilities to progress at a similar rate to other students. The curriculum is good, particularly in Years 10 to 13, where some of you spoke positively about the courses you can take. Students contribute well to the community and the student council is valued because it exerts influence on the decisions made in the school.

We have asked the school to improve teaching and learning by ensuring that all lessons focus on enabling you to reach challenging targets. Although much teaching is good, in rather too many lessons work is not sufficiently well matched to the range of abilities in the class. You are also not always given the guidance you need to achieve your targets. We were impressed with how well you evaluate your own progress when the criteria are explained to you. We are suggesting that this should happen more often. You can help by telling your teachers when you are unsure of how well you are doing and of what you must do to improve. We have also suggested to the school that it should improve the effectiveness of leadership and management so that all leaders focus more on ensuring all students reach challenging targets. Through your school council, you can give your views about how well these issues are being tackled.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick

Her Majesty's Inspector

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