

Woolmer Hill Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125251
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	340747
Inspection dates	25–26 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Christine Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	632
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Susan Stathers
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Bullen
Date of previous school inspection	5 December 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 33 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of evidence including school evaluation and development plans, information about students' performance and questionnaires completed by staff, students and 266 parents.

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

- The quality of students' learning and their progress.
- Underperformance in design and technology as a core subject.
- The impact of assessment strategies on students' learning.
- The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting students' learning and well-being.

Information about the school

Woolmer Hill is smaller than most secondary schools and was first designated as a technology college in 2002. The majority of students are of White British heritage with a small number from minority ethnic groups. A small proportion of students speak English as an additional language. The number of students taking up free school meals is well below average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is just above the national average. The school has gained Sportsmark, Artsmark Gold and International School awards.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Woolmer Hill is a successful school where students feel safe and cared for and achieve well. This view is supported by parents: as one commented, 'Each child is treated as an individual and made to feel special.' Students are proud of their school and keen to take up the opportunities offered. From attainment on entry which is just above the national average, the students make good progress to reach above average standards by the end of Year 11. They achieve particularly well in English where standards are consistently high. Achievement in mathematics is improving due to a significant improvement in the quality of teaching. Students do not perform as well in design and technology, a core subject in this technology college. Achievement in this subject has, until recently, been persistently lower than it should have been as teaching has not engaged students or met their needs. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress due to the good individual support they receive.

Students enjoy their education, are enthusiastic learners and are eager to take part in, and contribute to, the life of the school and the wider community. Their contributions range from older students acting as mentors for younger students to Year 10 students carrying out their own 'mini-Ofsted' assessment of the school. The students' commitment to the school is reflected in their good attendance and punctuality. The school council is well respected and its work valued by the staff.

Effective teaching results in good learning in lessons where students are engaged and interested in a wide variety of well-planned activities. Most teachers know their students very well and some are very skilful in developing and consolidating learning.

Students behave well both in and out of lessons although they sometimes become restless when teaching does not meet their needs. Appropriate strategies are in place to ensure students know the level they are working at and how to improve their work but these are not applied consistently by all teachers. The very good relationships between staff and students are enhanced by innovative strategies such as 'department prefects' where students are attached to, and work with, a specific subject department.

The school takes good care of the students and is committed to all aspects of care, guidance and support. Staff work hard to get to know their students as individuals and liaise with both families and agencies to ensure all students receive appropriate support and help.

The quality of education has improved under good leadership. Middle leaders are growing in confidence and are rising to the challenge of holding their teams to account for the achievement and well-being of students. There is good capacity for further improvement as the leadership team has an accurate picture and understanding of the

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school's strengths and weaknesses and knows what needs to be done to improve performance, especially in design and technology.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in design and technology by:
 - improving the quality of teaching and learning and ensuring lesson planning is focused consistently on students' progress
 - ensuring the design and technology curriculum is designed to be more engaging and relevant to the students' needs and interests.
- Make sure all staff support and apply the school's assessment strategies consistently so that all students know the standards they are reaching and understand what they need to do to improve their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The school is working hard to improve students' achievement and there is no significant difference in the performance of different groups of pupils. The percentage of students gaining at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics has been consistently above average for the last three years and rose by 7% in 2009. Although mathematics results are improving, the overall rise in standards is largely due to very good results in English where many students reach the highest grades. In the past, students' performance in design and technology has been disappointing for a technology college. Current standards in this subject are better and students now make satisfactory progress. This is due to recent management reorganisation and improvements to teaching and learning. Good attainment in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) provides a good foundation for further study and future employment.

In lessons, students are keen to learn and work effectively when tasks are appropriate and engaging. The quality of students' behaviour in lessons is directly related to the effectiveness of teaching and, in the best, is outstanding. Students are well aware of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and are keen to be involved in the good range of sporting activities provided by the school. They are less positive about school food and comment that the healthy options are 'too expensive'. All students feel very secure and know how to keep themselves and others safe in lessons and around the school. They do not feel that bullying is an issue but know who to speak to if they have concerns.

Most students are maturing into thoughtful, reliable citizens with their own clear views, well-considered opinions and a good understanding of right and wrong. Students make good use of the opportunities for quiet reflection during assemblies. They make a good contribution to the life of the school and the wider community through the responsibilities they are keen to take on. For example, student mentors and members of the well-established prefect system are good role models for younger students.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Good lessons are demanding and proceed at a brisk pace that keeps students on their toes and focused on their learning. Humour is an essential component of these lessons where both teachers and students enjoy working and learning together. Provision for ICT has improved through the school's specialist technology status and is used well by teachers to support learning. In the best lessons teachers are skilled in modifying and adapting their teaching during lessons to meet students' changing needs. However, more-able students are sometimes not sufficiently challenged or extended. Students' workbooks are usually marked regularly. Where the school's marking and assessment policy is used as intended, students' success is clearly identified and good guidance given on how to improve, but this is not always the case. The school has a good group of skilled teaching assistants who provide valued support in lessons.

The good curriculum is regularly reviewed to maintain its relevance to students' needs and interests. As a result of the improvements in ICT provision, all Year 9 students now complete ICT courses before starting their GCSEs. Flexible GCSE provision includes a wide range of subject choices including vocational education offered in school and as

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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part of a local federation of schools. The curriculum is enhanced by two enrichment days every term. A variety of activities such as team building adds diversity to students' learning. While specialist status has had limited impact on raising standards, its impact outside the school has been more marked. For example, there is a very successful Silver Surfers' Club where students help older members of the community with their ICT skills. There are also many links with local schools. The range of sporting and other activities provided by the school is described by students as 'amazing' and these are well attended.

The welfare of students is monitored carefully. Students who are vulnerable or at risk are identified effectively and given very good support and the school works well with external agencies such as educational welfare. Good transition arrangements from primary schools are appreciated by parents, many of whom commented that their children settled into their new school 'easily and happily'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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 headteacher and her effective senior team are united in their commitment to helping all students in their care achieve their best. Thorough self-evaluation draws on a wide range of information to focus on key priorities for improvement. Most managers routinely make use of the outcomes of secure monitoring procedures to plan for successful improvements. Challenging performance targets are used successfully in most areas to raise achievement. Progress towards meeting those targets is monitored carefully to ensure good value for money.

No form of discrimination is tolerated and equality of opportunity is promoted very successfully. This is illustrated by the good progress made by vulnerable students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As part of the good quality care the school takes of the students, robust procedures are in place to ensure their safety and all current legal requirements are met. Staff have been suitably trained in child protection and the school encourages a sensible attitude among students to keeping themselves safe. The school is active in promoting cohesion within its own community, in the local area and through international links as part of its status as an International School.

The school maintains good communications with parents through strategies such as progress review days and the new parents' portal on the school web site. The governing

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body has a good understanding of its role in supporting and challenging the school. Governors are reflective and always consider how best they can work with the school and evaluate their input.

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
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The response of most parents was strongly supportive of the school. A very small minority felt that the school did not help their child to have a healthy lifestyle, a criticism with which a few students agreed. The inspection found little evidence to support this view. Unacceptable behaviour was another concern raised by a few parents but again this was not supported by the inspection. A very few parents expressed concerns about communicating with the school and getting help to support their own child's learning. There was little evidence that this was a widespread concern and the vast majority felt well informed.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Woolmer Hill 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 266 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 632 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	69	28	159	64	15	6	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	75	30	161	65	9	4	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	99	40	139	56	9	4	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	60	24	157	63	25	10	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	42	17	189	76	7	3	3	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	63	25	156	63	18	7	5	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	11	174	70	31	12	4	2
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)	71	29	146	59	14	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	52	21	164	66	17	7	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	40	16	146	59	33	13	7	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	15	163	65	18	7	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	67	27	162	65	10	4	6	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	70	28	160	64	15	6	3	1

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.



10 December 2009

Dear students

Inspection of Woolmer Hill Technology College, Haslemere, GU27 1QB

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and being in your lessons. We were particularly impressed by the pride you take in your school. This letter is to tell you what we found.

- Woolmer Hill is a good and improving school.
- You make good progress and reach good standards, especially in English GCSE.
- Your achievement in design and technology has been disappointing in the past but is improving this term.
- You tell us you feel safe in the school and learn a lot in your lessons when they are lively and interesting.
- You really enjoy school and your attendance is good.
- You make a good contribution to the school and are keen to take on responsibilities.
- The school takes good care of you and there is always someone to help if needed.
- Many of your teachers plan lessons that will keep you interested and help you to learn successfully, but teachers do not always tell you enough about the standard of your work and how to improve.
- The headteacher and her staff are committed to making sure you are able to fulfil your potential.

We have asked the school to look at the following areas to help you to improve.

- Raise your achievement in design and technology by improving teaching, making sure you make good progress in lessons and developing the subject so that it is more relevant to your needs and interests.
- Make sure all teachers help you to understand the levels you are reaching and know what to do to improve your work.

We wish you well for the future.

Christine Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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