

Dartford Science & Technology College

Heath Lane, Dartford, Kent DA1 2LY

Inspection dates

7–8 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal, senior leaders and governors have made sure this is an increasingly effective school. Leaders have identified and tackled areas of relative weakness. The school is a place where pupils achieve well and thrive.
- Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are making good progress across a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Leaders hold all staff to account effectively through rigorous performance management. The rich range of training and support ensures that teaching has improved.
- Teachers' secure subject knowledge and enthusiasm contribute to high levels of engagement by pupils.
- Teaching provides suitable levels of challenge for pupils of varying ability. This supports good and often strong progress. However, the most able pupils are not consistently stretched to a high degree.
- In subjects where outcomes have not been so strong in the past, such as languages, progress is improving because of more effective teaching.
- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. It makes a good contribution to their positive behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils feel safe and are happy. They value highly the support they receive from all of the staff.
- The actions of leaders on improving attendance have been revised and improved this year. However, levels of attendance remain below the national figure.
- Typically, the sixth form provides well for its students. Nevertheless, teaching is not consistently effective. In some areas, students do not make sustained and strong progress across the breadth of their study programmes.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching continues to improve so it is consistently strong in all subjects and maximises progress for the most able pupils.
- Make sure that attendance continues to improve so that the proportion of pupils with poor attendance decreases.
- Develop teaching in the sixth form to enable students to make equally strong progress across the breadth of their study programmes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The leadership team has upheld the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school's vision, 'Inspiring Education – Nurturing Success', is evident in all aspects of school life. Leaders' commitment to achieving the best for pupils is shared by staff. The school is a nurturing, engaging place where pupils achieve well and flourish.
- Leaders and governors demonstrate a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Suitable actions are taken to tackle any areas of weakness. As a result, the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and their behaviour continue to improve.
- Staff morale is very positive. Staff are proud to work at the school. There is a culture of high aspiration and expectation and everyone is treated as an individual. Consequently, everyone feels valued and contributes effectively to life in the school.
- Leaders have set up an effective approach for assessing and tracking pupils' progress. This provides leaders with helpful information about the progress of each group in every subject. Senior leaders make good use of this information to gain an insight into the quality of teaching, and to challenge middle leaders when needed. Nevertheless, leaders recognise that the information they gather does not show the extent to which pupils are making rapid progress.
- Leaders make good use of the information they collect about the quality of teaching. They know what requires attention and ensure that teachers receive effective high-quality training and support. As a result, teaching is increasingly strong.
- Until recently, the performance and development of support staff were not well managed. The principal made this a priority upon her appointment to the school. Leaders now hold performance reviews with support staff. Training is provided which helps support staff fulfil their roles well. This covers a variety of topics, such as assessment, planning for learning, safeguarding, health and safety and developing leadership capacity. Leaders' work has been received well by support staff and has helped them ensure that they carry out their duties effectively.
- Leaders make good use of additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Leaders provide a broad range of extra support to improve the learning and attendance of these pupils, including after-school clubs and holiday schools. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils typically make strong progress. Disadvantaged pupils who arrive from primary schools with lower levels of literacy and numeracy receive additional teaching in reading, writing and numeracy, which leads to good progress. For example, reading ages of disadvantaged pupils in Year 7 have improved notably since the start of the year.
- The leader responsible for the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has successfully introduced several changes in approach, which have led to improved achievement for these pupils. For example, those pupils with lower than expected standards in reading undertake a 12-week reading support programme run by teaching assistants. The majority of pupils receiving this support

have improved their reading skills quickly. In addition, teachers have been equipped with more effective strategies to improve the quality of teaching of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result of this, these pupils are now making better progress in many subjects.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. British values are promoted in citizenship lessons and in other subjects, for example in history and English. Effective careers education is provided across all years, with work experience in Year 11 and the sixth form. This helps pupils make well-informed choices that meet their needs and aspirations. Pupils' experiences are enhanced by the school's 'Essential 7' programme. This offers a range of extra-curricular enrichment activities, such as sports and art clubs, and subject-focused interventions, including mathematics, science and media studies.
- Leaders have set up a useful link with the local teaching school alliance. This provides opportunities for teachers to share good practice.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well catered for. Assemblies, tutor time, lessons and a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities all contribute well to this. For example, in assemblies pupils learn about e-safety and healthy lifestyles. Charity and local community events are regular features of school life.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is strongly dedicated to improving standards and provides strong support and challenge to school leaders. Governors set high expectations of the leaders, demonstrating a clear understanding of the school's context, challenges and priorities.
- Governors hold leaders effectively to account for the performance of the school. They regularly review performance and progress information provided by the principal and other leaders. They do not hold back from challenging leaders by asking probing questions of, and demanding answers on, such areas as finance, health and safety, recruitment of staff and outcomes.
- Governors have undertaken a range of suitable training in order to fulfil their statutory duties and make a strong contribution to the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Procedures and policies meet statutory requirements and records are detailed and of high quality.
- Leaders and governors have been appropriately trained to ensure that checks on the suitability of staff are sound. Training of staff and governors is both comprehensive and regular. Leaders make sure that staff who join the school during the year receive relevant training regarding safeguarding and child protection practices. As a result, staff know the signs to look out for when identifying potential areas of concern and if a pupil may be at risk.

- Leaders work effectively with outside agencies, such as the local authority, social services and the police, as required to support vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and well cared for. Instances of bullying are rare, and when they do occur, the staff deal with them swiftly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers demonstrate a strong enthusiasm for their subjects and are keen to share their strong subject knowledge with pupils. Teachers know their pupils well and can identify individuals' strengths and weaknesses. This allows teachers to support pupils appropriately. Excellent relationships exist between adults and pupils.
- Teachers use questioning skilfully to probe and develop pupils' knowledge and check for understanding. Questioning at different levels helps to ensure that pupils of differing levels of ability are equally well catered for. Teachers successfully use the information they glean from pupils' responses to adjust their teaching and to provide appropriate support where learning is not secure.
- Pupils are typically keen to learn and improve. They demonstrate pride in their work in all lessons. Books are well presented and maintained. There is a positive climate for learning throughout the school.
- Leaders have recently developed the school's assessment system so it suitably aligns with the planned changes to GCSE measures. Information on pupils' individual targets is readily available for pupils to check their progress. This means pupils can confidently identify the point at which they are currently working and can recognise and seek advice when improvement is needed.
- Teachers provide feedback to pupils in line with the school's assessment policy, giving useful information on strengths and areas for improvement to guide them in their next steps for learning.
- Leaders have recently employed specialist teaching assistants in English and mathematics. They and other teaching assistants are used effectively to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, they provide one-to-one and small group support in lessons, which usually leads to pupils making progress in these subjects.
- Typically, teachers ensure appropriate levels of challenge in lessons to extend the learning of all pupils. In the main this works well, but the progress of some most-able pupils is not consistently being pushed to the highest level, as some work is not sufficiently demanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils know who to contact if they have concerns while in school and are confident that they will receive appropriate support.

- Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. Pupils speak extremely positively about the support they receive, such as emotional well-being support and, for the few who need it, counselling.
- Pupils reported that incidents of prejudiced behaviour, such as homophobic and racist language, are very rare. Pupils also benefit from careers education, learning about healthy lifestyles and being citizens in a multicultural local and wider community.
- The school council is very active and is effective in allowing pupils' views to be heard. Members of the council enjoy what they do and are pleased that their actions have brought positive changes to life in school. For example, they suggested changes to the lunchtime systems and more opportunities to access the library, both of which have been implemented by leaders and have proved successful.
- Leaders make regular visits to the alternative provision centres to make sure that pupils who attend alternative provision are kept safe and make good progress. The school receives regular attendance and assessment information for each of the pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have worked positively to maintain standards of behaviour. Pupils respond well to the recently introduced smart card, which they carry to record good behaviour and attitude. This, coupled with an improved rewards system, is proving effective in ensuring that behaviour remains good.
- Pupils are polite to each other and to staff. They move around the school in an orderly manner. At break and lunchtimes, pupils sit and socialise quietly in the dining area or at the external seating areas. They respect the environment. There is no graffiti and litter is rarely seen.
- In the study centre, pupils complete homework and undertake independent research on computers in a quiet and focused way.
- Typically, pupils arrive punctually to lessons, appropriately equipped and ready to learn. They exhibit positive attitudes to learning, paying attention and working hard. Disruption to learning is rare and, where it does occur, teachers deal with it effectively.
- Attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, has been below national averages in recent years. The school has historically had an above-average level of pupil mobility. For example, 49 pupils have joined the school since September 2016. A number of these pupils arrive with a poor attendance record. Leaders' recent actions to improve attendance are starting to have an impact for those whose attendance was particularly low. This is yet to translate into overall improvements in the proportion of these groups of pupils who have low attendance. However, leaders are now well placed to secure further improvements and make sure that all groups of pupils attend well.
- Exclusion rates for all groups of pupils have reduced in the current year. This has come about as a result of setting clear levels of expectation and the use of an increasingly effective behaviour monitoring and rewards system.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress across the school in a wide range of subjects. Increasingly effective teaching and support has led to notable improvements in aspects of achievement which had previously been relatively weak. All groups of pupils achieve well.
- In 2016, by the end of key stage 4, pupils with middle and high starting points had typically made progress in line with the national figure in most subjects. However, the achievement last year of pupils with low starting points, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, was low. Improvements in provision for these pupils' needs mean that those currently in the school are making good progress.
- Pupils read confidently at a level appropriate to their age. Additional funding has been used well to develop the reading of Year 7 pupils who enter the school with below-average reading ages. As a result, these pupils have caught up quickly and are equipped with the reading skills needed to learn effectively.
- Pupils' progress in English and science and most other subjects is consistently strong. Achievement in mathematics and languages, which had been a relative weakness, has improved. However, progress in history remains an area for attention. Leaders acknowledge this and have taken action to develop leadership capacity in humanities to ensure that pupils catch up where required.
- The most able pupils make good overall progress. Where teaching is most effective, these pupils are very effectively stretched and challenged to the extent needed. However, this is not consistent across the breadth of the curriculum.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form provides well for its students. Leaders have made sure all students study a suitable set of well-taught qualifications, complemented by a rich range of wider opportunities to learn about the world. In this way, they develop skills needed for the world of work and life in modern Britain.
- Teaching and learning is effective and provides well for students' needs overall so that they make good progress in their study programmes. However, it is not consistently strong in some areas, such as psychology, to enable progress to be even more rapid.
- Students who did not achieve at least a grade C GCSE in English and mathematics at the end of Year 11 are provided with the teaching and support needed to improve their knowledge and understanding in these subjects. Consequently, students achieve well.
- Work experience and careers education and guidance are strong. Students receive work experience from a variety of workplaces, including, for example, banks, legal firms and primary schools. Students say that they feel well prepared for life beyond school. They benefit from the input of ambassadors from the University of Kent, who support them in completing applications for universities. Many students on vocational courses have applied for apprenticeships with companies in the local area and beyond.

- The proportion of students moving into education, employment or training has increased since the last inspection.
- Students enjoy life in the sixth form. They feel safe and secure. They are keen to contribute to the broader aspects of life in the school, for example by being involved in the school council, acting as prefects and supporting younger pupils in developing their reading.
- Leaders have successfully acted on several recommendations from a local authority review of sixth-form provision that took place in December 2015. For example, students now have improved access to computers for independent study and are given increasing challenge in their work to reach higher grades.
- Students have the opportunity to combine studies in a choice of academic and vocational courses. Historically, students' achievement in vocational courses has consistently been above the national average, whereas in academic courses it has been average. School information shows that current students' progress in academic courses is improving.
- Leaders are tackling previous weaknesses in teaching in Year 12. Students' achievement in AS-level qualifications has declined over the previous three years, being below the national average in 2016. Leaders have rightly analysed the causes of this decline, identifying comparatively weaker teaching in some subjects. As a result, the range of AS subjects currently on offer has been reduced to focus on those with the strongest outcomes. This change, coupled with leaders' improved monitoring and tracking of students' progress, ensures that students have the teaching and support needed to learn well.

School details

Unique reference number	118785
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10024564

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	724
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	106
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Mr D Edwards
Principal	Mrs A Davis
Telephone number	01322 224309
Website	www.dstc.kent.sch.uk
Email address	office@dstc.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–22 November 2012

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Dartford Science & Technology College is a smaller-than-average girls' school. It has a small mixed sixth form in which the very large majority of students are girls.
- The majority of students are White British.
- The current principal was appointed in September 2016.

- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils entering and leaving the school in any one academic year is higher than average. For example, one in four pupils of last year's Year 11 did not start at the school in Year 7.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The school uses two off-site pupil referral units: The Limes and Centre Class. Each of these has three pupils attending full time.
- Prior attainment of pupils on entry to the school for nearly all year groups is below the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 23 lessons, including joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' books and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils, representatives of the school council and students in the sixth form. They also met pupils informally during breaks and lunch times.
- Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders, teachers and support staff, and governors. Inspectors took account of 36 responses by parents to the online questionnaire (Parent View), and 34 comments by free text. Inspectors also considered 12 responses to the pupil survey and 50 responses to the staff survey.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan, information about the management of staff performance, pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance records, and a range of policies and minutes of governors' meetings.

Inspection team

David Powell, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Storey	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Baker	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Powell	Ofsted Inspector
Pat Slonecki	Ofsted Inspector

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