

# Holmesdale Technology College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	118796
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	358445
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 May 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Brian Netto

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Modern (non-selective)
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	914
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	83
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Richard Sams
<b>Principal</b>	Julia Campbell, Ian Hobson (Executive Principal)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 February 2008
<b>School address</b>	Malling Road Snodland ME6 5HS
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<b>Email address</b>	headteacher@holmesdale.kent.sch.uk

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They visited 42 lessons or part lessons and observed 39 teachers. They met with the Executive Principal, the School Principal, the Chair of Governors and two other members of the governing body, middle leaders and students. They observed the school's work, and looked at school plans, records of students' progress, policies, minutes and self-evaluation documents. They received and analysed 55 five questionnaires from parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The current attainment in Years 10 and 11, particularly in mathematics.
- The extent to which teaching and assessment meets the needs of key groups of students consistently, especially middle- and higher-ability boys, and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The impact of senior leaders, subject leaders and the governing body in driving and sustaining improvement.

## Information about the school

Holmesdale is a smaller-than-average secondary school. It is formally federated with a neighbouring school, under the leadership of an executive principal and a single governing body. Nearly all students come from White British heritages. A low percentage comes from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds and, within this, few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has been a specialist technology college since 2001 and a fully extended school for five years. The school has received a number of awards, including Investors in People and the International School Award. There is an on-site special school for autism, although this was not part of this inspection.

**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

Holmesdale Technology College is a good school on an upward journey of improvement. Under the dynamic leadership of the executive principal and school principal, supported well by other school leaders, effective actions have been taken to tackle weaknesses so that outcomes for students of all abilities are improving rapidly. The governing body makes a strong contribution across the federation to ensure that the school is kept constantly under review. This contribution helps to ensure that development planning focuses well on improving the school quickly. As a result of good self-evaluation and effective leadership, there has demonstrated a good capacity for sustained improvements.

When students join the school, their attainment is below and sometimes well below average. School leaders are now successfully working to raise attainment. Taking into account the rates of progress of students currently taking examinations, and the current progress of groups of students, including students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achievement is good and progress is accelerating rapidly and securely. There is, however, more to do to improve attainment in mathematics.

Good-quality teaching is helping students to learn well overall. However, occasionally, learning is no better than satisfactory because teachers do not make the best of longer-term and day-to-day assessment information to plan work which consistently meets the needs of all students. Leaders are, correctly, focused on ensuring that learning is never less than good and that more becomes outstanding. Leaders check learning in lessons carefully. As a result, teachers are being helped to improve the way that they assess students' learning and plan their next lesson so that students can make accelerated progress. This has resulted from a concerted focus on professional development and opportunities for staff to work together to support and review their work.

The curriculum, especially at Key Stage 3, is matched well to students' needs and interests. For example, there is more project work in Years 7 and 8. Inspectors endorse the thoughts of one parent, who said 'We have been pleased with the school in ensuring good progress...particularly with the project-based learning linking with a variety of subject areas encouraging research and evaluation techniques'. Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good, but students are not always skilled enough in how to do independent research and this is an important area for improvement.

The school cares for and supports students well in their personal development and provides them with effective academic and personal guidance. The students' positive relationships with their teachers and their peers are demonstrated by their good behaviour around the school and in almost all lessons. The students feel safe because they have a good understanding of personal security, and because the school adopts good practice in safeguarding systems.

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Although there was a low response to the parental questionnaire, school surveys show that a large majority of parents and carers are supportive of the school's work. However, a very small minority are less positive. The executive principal and school principal are determined to work closely with all parents and carers, especially to ensure that they support the school's drive to raise attainment. Strong partnerships with parents, carers and a wide range of schools and different agencies are ensuring that the school continues to improve and promotes effective community cohesion.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Increase the rate of progress made by students in mathematics so that attainment rises further.
- Ensure that teaching is never less than good with an increasing proportion of outstanding lessons by:
  - ensuring that teachers take rigorous account of information from assessments consistently when planning lessons, so that activities challenge and engage students to very best effect
  - expanding opportunities for teachers to share good and outstanding practice
- Develop students' independent learning skills in the sixth form.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

Students achieve well and make good progress overall in both their academic and personal development. As a result, their attainment, by the time that they leave the school, is average overall. Staffing expertise has improved and, together with well-targeted support, is helping students to catch up with any gaps in their learning. Nonetheless, mathematics remains a focus for improvement, as leaders are ambitious to lift attainment still further. Inspectors observed some outstanding teaching in Year 7 project-based lessons, which engaged students, enabling them to recognise next steps in their learning so that they could achieve challenging targets.

Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress in line with their peers and often exceed their ambitious targets. The school's latest data suggests that students currently in Years 10 and 11 are well placed to achieve their challenging targets. Students make good progress in lessons and enjoy learning, especially when they are actively involved. In such lessons, students respond enthusiastically and work well together to meet the high expectations and demands from their teachers.

Students say they feel safe and treat each other and adults with respect and consideration. The grouping of students into house groups across different ages and the support offered by other, older students who act as mentors ensure that relationships across the school are positive. Behaviour is good overall, especially in lessons that engage and motivate students and involve them in their own learning and assessment. Students say that incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Exclusions are decreasing rapidly, providing evidence for the impact of the school's behaviour policy in promoting students' responsibility for their own actions.

Inspection evidence confirms that a large proportion of students participate in sporting activities outside of the taught physical education curriculum and this contributes much to

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the way that the students are adopting healthy lifestyles. Most students take an active part in the school community and also students contribute to strategic decisions, including staff appointments. Attendance is in line with national averages and the school has made great efforts in reducing persistent absence.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>3</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

## How effective is the provision?

The broad range of curriculum opportunities is matched well to the students' diverse needs. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of after-school clubs, including sporting activities and performing arts, and many cultural and social visits a notable event being the federation choir performance in the O2 Arena in London. The curriculum is enhanced through collaboration with local schools and curriculum innovation, such as the project-based learning in Years 7 and 8, and the 'subject taster' system which helps to prepare Year 9 students for their Key Stage 4 options, all contribute to effective learning opportunities. Specialist status has helped the school to develop students' access to information and communication technology.

Teachers help students to reflect thoughtfully about their progress. As a result, students are able to recognise what they need to do to achieve their ambitious personal targets. As a result of good teaching and assessment, the needs of middle- and higher-ability boys, as well as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are met well.

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In the most effective lessons, inspectors observed skilful teacher questioning and carefully constructed opportunities for students to review their own work and that of other students; this helps to them to improve their understanding. The vast majority of lessons seen offered suitable challenge and excitement and students were fully engaged. Lessons observed in physical education built on the students' learning, allowed students to check their own progress, and enabled effective reflection on how to improve further, thereby deepening their understanding. Occasionally, in lessons which are less effective, teachers miss opportunities to deepen students' understanding. In such lessons, insufficient attention is paid to the student's prior attainment and learning needs.

Students value the one-to-one mentoring and opportunities to read with younger students (paired reading), and younger students benefit from working with older students who act as role models. Staff know their students well and parents and carers have confidence in the good level of care which the school provides. Students who are potentially vulnerable or at risk are supported well, in collaboration with a wide range of external agencies, and this is demonstrated in the progress that many of these students are making. Most students and most parents and carers say that the school keeps them well informed about progress.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The executive principal, together with the school principal, and ably supported by the leadership team, has outlined ambitious targets for school improvement. Effective review and evaluation systems work across the federation to monitor progress towards these targets. The successful changes that have occurred recently under the clear leadership of the new school principal mean that high expectations are consistently communicated to good effect. The school has well-developed systems for monitoring teaching and learning and professional development within the school and across the federation is helping to improve the quality of teaching. The governing body is well informed and provides good support and challenge, leading to improving outcomes for students.

The school works closely with a range of partners and this contributes to improvements in the curriculum and in the care, guidance and support of the students. Effective measures are in place to ensure students' safety and safeguarding procedures are good. The school's commitment to equality of opportunity is ensuring that gaps in achievement are narrowing between different groups of students. Specialist status has enabled good partnership working with business and the community.

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The school's contribution to community cohesion is good. Its strengths are in the well-established international links, as evident in the school gaining the 'International Award' and through its good engagement with the local community. The school is developing ways for students to understand and experience the diverse nature of communities across the United Kingdom in its drive for community cohesion to become outstanding in the future.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## **Sixth form**

Provision is satisfactory overall and consequently outcomes for students are generally satisfactory and sometimes good. Some teaching is good in some subjects. Students value the wide range of choices provided by the school and its partner schools. Students enter the sixth form with below average attainment and many lack important skills in independent learning. Students make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Further work is planned on enriching literacy, extending vocabulary and enabling more opportunities for students to develop their oral skills, in order for them to access higher-level qualifications. Students are positive about their school and take an active role in promoting improvement. Provision is satisfactory overall and consequently outcomes for students are generally satisfactory and sometimes good. Some teaching is good in some subjects. Students value the wide range of choices provided by the school and its partner schools. Students enter the sixth form with below average attainment and many lack important skills in independent learning. Students make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Further work is planned on enriching literacy, extending vocabulary and enabling more opportunities for students to develop their oral skills, in order for them to access higher-level qualifications. Students are positive about their school and take an active role in promoting improvement.

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Students receive good guidance on entering the sixth form and this is helping to increase the numbers staying on and raising retention rates for 'A' Levels. Improved leadership in this area has helped to raise attendance and ensure that monitoring and review are more robust and lead to greater consistency in the quality of learning between different subject departments. For example, leaders are tackling weaknesses in the provision for religious education.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>3</b>
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

The large majority of parents and carers support the work of the school, although the response to the inspection survey was very low. However, other information from the school confirmed that parents and carers are largely positive about the school, and attend parent meetings in large numbers. A very small minority of parents and carers raised concerns about the school. The school is working hard to strengthen links with parents and carers and has the capacity to address these concerns. Parents and carers noted some concerns about behaviour. The inspection team found behaviour to be good overall. Equally, some parents and carers do not feel that the school promotes a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors judged this aspect of the school to be good overall.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Holmesdale 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 55 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 914 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	10	18	38	69	5	9	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	10	18	43	78	2	4	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	12	22	37	67	5	9	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	13	24	36	65	5	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	10	18	38	69	4	7	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	6	11	38	69	9	16	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	4	7	37	67	12	22	1	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)	7	13	36	65	7	13	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	13	41	75	6	11	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	4	7	33	60	13	24	3	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	7	31	56	10	18	2	4
The school is led and managed effectively	7	13	37	67	7	13	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	11	20	37	67	5	9	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 all 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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



11 May 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of Holmesdale Technology College, Snodland, ME6 5HS**

You will remember that I visited your school with some colleagues as part of an inspection. I would like to thank you for your warm welcome and your willingness to talk to us and give us your views; this helped us to reach our judgments about the school.

I am pleased to report to you that you are receiving a good quality of education and that by the end of Year 11 you reach standards similar to most schools. You make good progress and achieve well. The inspectors were particularly impressed with your behaviour and respect for each other around the school and in the majority of lessons. They could see that you have a good understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and were pleased by how safe you feel within the school.

To support your school's continuing improvement, I have asked your executive principal and school principal to:

- raise achievement in mathematics, for example by making lessons more challenging and exciting
- make teaching better still
- develop your skills further so that you can make the most of what the sixth form has to offer.

I am sure that you will play your part in these improvements in the school, by continuing to behave responsibly and by attending school regularly.

Yours sincerely

Brian Netto

Lead Inspector

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