

West Exe Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113505
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	325829
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Sanderson HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1,291
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Paul Smith
Headteacher	Mr Steve Maddern
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 June 2006
School address	Hatherleigh Road Exeter Devon EX2 9JU
Telephone number	01392 660100
Fax number	01392 686175
Email address	admin@westexetc.devon.sch.uk

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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 35 part lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students and the college's improvement partner. They observed the college's work, and looked at the college's self-evaluation and planning documents, policy documents, students' books, 293 parental questionnaires, staff questionnaires and student questionnaires.

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

- whether all groups of students in the college make good progress
- the quality of the action being taken by the leaders to improve attendance
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels to raise standards and reduce the variation in achievement between different subjects.

Information about the school

West Exe Technology College is a larger than average comprehensive school. In September 2006, the college moved to new buildings built on the college site. The college has an off-site inclusion unit which provides a learning centre for Key Stage 4 students with extra needs. Most students are from a White British background and the number of students whose first language is not English is low for a school of this size. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national average. The percentage of students with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The most commonly identified of these needs relate to emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The college has been a specialist Technology College since 1996 and gained two additional specialisms in Applied Learning and Leading Edge in April 2007. The college has attained Artsmark, Sportsmark, Investors in People Award, Investors in Careers Award and Investors in Enterprise and Work Related Learning.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

West Exe Technology College is a good school. Its commitment to sustained improvement has enabled it to move on at a good pace since the last inspection. Equality of opportunity is vigorously promoted and makes a key contribution to the creation of a welcoming and inclusive school. Students speak positively of the good support provided to them by teachers.

The quality of teaching and the progress made by students have both improved since the previous inspection. Standards at the end of Year 11 rose in 2008 and students make good progress in their learning from Year 7 through to Year 11. A number of factors have led to these improvements. The college is well led. Leaders and managers have high expectations for students and targets are suitably challenging. A very effective system for tracking students' progress has been introduced and those who are underachieving are identified and provided with good support. The curriculum has also been improved and is now outstanding. It is flexible and responsive to the needs of individual students and provides them with a wide range of both academic and vocational options.

A particular strength of the college is the quality of its self-evaluation procedures. This process involves a wide range of stakeholders, including governors, parents, staff and students. Middle leaders have all received training on how to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. These procedures mean that the senior leadership team knows the strengths and weaknesses of the college well and has good plans in place to address areas in need of improvement. Clear improvement planning and rising student achievement provide the college with a good capacity for further improvement.

Students enjoy school and their attitudes to learning are mostly good. They particularly appreciate lessons that involve them actively in their learning. The majority of lessons are at least good and this is why progress is good. However, to improve progress still further and reduce variation in achievement between subjects, a higher percentage of lessons need to be good or outstanding. Students behave sensibly when moving around the college. They say they feel safe in college and that incidents of bullying are rare and, when they do occur, are quickly dealt with.

The attendance of students is no higher than average because there is a small percentage of students who have low attendance rates. The college is taking a series

of appropriate measures to improve attendance. These have proved to be effective in the past, but improvement to attendance has stalled this year.

The college's specialisms are having a positive impact on outcomes for students. They have enabled it to improve its information and communication technology (ICT) resources, supported improvements in teaching and the curriculum, and facilitated stronger links with business, industry and local schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the percentage of good and better teaching in the college to at least 90% and outstanding teaching to 25% by the end of the academic year 2010/2011 by:
 - sharing good and outstanding practice
 - ensuring assessment information is used well by all teachers to differentiate engaging tasks for students and that the pace of lessons is sufficient to enable all students to make at least good progress
- Improve the attendance of students to 93.5% by the end of the next academic year and to 94% by the end of the following year by:
 - taking action to re-engage students who are persistently absent and reinforce partnerships with their parents. The college should reduce the percentage of students who are persistently absent from school to 5.5% by the end of this academic year and to 4.5% by the end of the following academic year.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

All students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, made good progress in the majority of lessons observed. Most students behave well, enjoy learning and are keen to do their best. They willingly become actively involved in the learning activities provided for them by teachers. When tasks are engaging, students' concentration is good and they persevere well in order to find success in the task they have been set. However, when tasks are less engaging, some students lose concentration and their behaviour deteriorates. Students in the inclusion centre are provided with very effective support and make good progress in their learning.

The attainment of students on entry to the college is slightly below the national average. Examination results attained by Year 11 in 2008 demonstrate that standards are rising in the college and the progress made by students is improving. The inclusive nature of the college is demonstrated by the fact that all students attained at least one GCSE or equivalent pass and nearly all achieved five passes. Lesson observations and analysis of the college's tracking data indicate that progress made by students is good. The college achieved most of its challenging specialist school targets in 2008. Overall standards attained at the end of Year 11 are broadly average.

The leadership team is taking action to reduce the variation in achievement between different subjects. For example, effective action has been taken to raise achievement

in science since the last inspection. However, the leadership team acknowledges that more needs to be done to raise achievement in this subject to the level of the best.

The opportunities for students to take responsibility in the college are numerous and varied, and they are ready volunteers. There is an active college council that is effective in making a difference. Staff regularly seek and respond to the views of students and they are involved in a very wide range of local community events and regularly raise money for national and international charities. The curriculum supports the good development of students' ICT, numeracy and literacy skills, which are required for their future economic well-being. The college also uses its links with business and industry very effectively to develop students' enterprise skills.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

How effective is the provision?

The following are the features seen in the good and better lessons observed by inspectors.

- Teachers have high expectations and they are aware of the students' targets.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and a good understanding of test and examination requirements.
- Assessment information is used well to ensure that the work set meets the needs of the different abilities of students in the class.
- Lessons are well planned and contain a range of active, engaging activities.
- ICT is used well by both teachers and students in lessons to maximise opportunities for learning and maintain interest.
- Very effective support is provided by learning support assistants to those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to those few students for whom English is an additional language.
- Students with challenging behaviour are managed well and kept motivated and

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

on task.

Although the majority of the teaching in the college is of this standard, this is not consistently the case. In some lessons, activities do not fully engage students because they are not pitched closely enough to their level of ability, or the pace of learning is not fast enough. In these lessons, students make satisfactory progress.

Staff know and care for students extremely well. There is a strong commitment within the college to ensure that barriers to learning are removed for all students. The student support team demonstrates an impressive approach to inclusion and they work extremely well with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that vulnerable students are provided with very effective support. The support for students in Years 10 and 11 in the inclusion centre is outstanding and makes a positive impact on their attitudes, confidence and achievement.

The curriculum is regularly reviewed and innovative developments ensure that it meets the needs of students extremely well. For example, the new iLearn course in Year 7 is making an outstanding contribution to developing students' independent learning and thinking skills. Students are offered a very broad range of both academic and vocational courses to examination level. This range is extended through excellent collaboration with a local college. There is flexibility built into the curriculum to meet individual students' needs. For example, some students can take AS courses in Year 11, while those students for whom English is an additional language are supported by a specific language development course. The curriculum is enhanced by a broad range of visits and trips. The range of extra-curricular activities is extensive and well attended. These activities provide students with memorable learning experiences and positively contribute to their personal development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides the college with very clear and effective strategic leadership. He is well supported by senior leaders who share his strong commitment to improving the achievement and attainment of all students. The targets set for students are challenging and reflect the college's high expectations. The system for tracking students' progress against these targets is robust and is used well by staff to identify those students who are underachieving. This system, allied with good intervention programmes, is having a positive impact on raising the achievement of all groups of students. The college has done much to improve the consistency of achievement across different subject areas, but some variation still remains.

The college has developed very good systems of monitoring and evaluation and an effective plan is in place to address areas in need of improvement. The governing body makes a good contribution to school improvement, offering both strategic direction and support and challenge to the leadership team.

Highly effective monitoring and recording systems are in place to ensure the safety and welfare of all members of the college community, including staff. Safeguarding procedures are very secure. Child protection procedures are fully in place and the school works extremely well with a wide range of professionals to safeguard and support students. Checks on staff are robust and meet government requirements.

Extremely strong partnerships have been created with a range of external organisations and other providers, notably, but not exclusively, through the college's specialisms; this has helped to foster an outward-looking ethos, contributing to raised aspirations. The college makes a good contribution to community cohesion. Students participate in a wide range of activities within the local community and, through their curriculum, have a good understanding of the range of cultures and faiths found in this country and in the world.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at West Exe Technology College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the college. If a parent has more than one child at the college, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspection team received 293 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 1,142 parents and carers registered at the college.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	136	126	21	8

The very large majority of questionnaires received from parents were supportive of the college. A number commented positively on the support and care provided by staff. A few parents raised a concern about disruptive behaviour in lessons. Although inspectors did observe some low level disruption in a small minority of lessons when activities failed to engage students, the overall behaviour of students in lessons was good.

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. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
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. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
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.

15 May 2009

Dear Students



Inspection of West Exe Technology College, Exeter, EX2 9JU

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your college recently. We very much enjoyed our discussions with you. Now that we have finished the inspection, we wanted to let you know our findings.

Your college is a good school. It provides you with a good standard of education and it has improved since the last time it was inspected. The following points are the key strengths of the college.

- You are taught well and are making good progress in lessons.
- Teachers set you challenging targets, track your progress well and provide you with effective support when you need it.
- You make the most of the many opportunities to take on roles of responsibility, such as acting as mentors or prefects or through becoming involved in the active college council.
- The majority of you behave well in lessons and around the college site.
- The college provides you with an outstanding range of academic and vocational courses that are tailored to meet your particular needs and interests.
- You are well cared for and supported by staff, including those of you who are taught in the inclusion centre.
- You have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of local community events, and lessons are helping you develop a good understanding of the range of cultures and faiths found in this country and around the world.
- You have all benefited from the college's specialisms.

To make your college even better, we have asked the leadership team to make a couple of important improvements. In the majority of your lessons, you are taught well and make good or better progress, and we have asked them to ensure that more of your lessons are like this. At the moment, some of you do not attend college regularly enough. We have asked the leadership team to work with both you and your parents to ensure that you attend more regularly.

You can help to make these improvements by continuing to become actively involved in activities arranged for you by staff and by some of you making every effort to attend college more regularly.

I wish you all good luck for the future.

Yours faithfully

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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