

Solway Community Technology College

Little Street, Silloth, Wigton, Cumbria, CA7 4DD

Inspection dates 12–13 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Many students make the progress that is expected of them from starting points that are generally well-below average. However, a few students make insufficient progress and not enough students make better than expected progress. Consequently, attainment measures over time remain below average. Students do not achieve well in science.
- Although there is some good and outstanding teaching, too many teachers expect students of different abilities to complete the same work. This lack of regard for students' prior attainment affects adversely the progress that they make.
- The quality of marking and feedback is variable. Not all teachers explain effectively what students need to do to improve their work. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of the standard of students' written work.
- Progress targets that are set for students, particularly the least able, are not always aspirational enough.
- Senior leaders and governors do not monitor effectively enough the quality of teaching and the impact that this is having on students' learning and progress.
- Leaders of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are not effective enough in ensuring that all students make good progress in the curriculum areas for which they are responsible.

The school has the following strengths

- This is an inclusive school where every student is valued. There are very strong relationships between students and staff. Students feel safe, speak highly of the care which they receive and feel proud of their school community.
- Students are courteous, mature and articulate. They show respect to each other, staff and visitors. A friendly, welcoming ethos permeates all aspects of school life.
- Senior leaders have worked hard to improve student behaviour in and around the school. They have succeeded in creating a tangible positive ethos which is shared by staff, students and their families.
- Students benefit from strong teaching in several of the foundation subjects, such as art, physical education and hospitality and catering.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons taught by 14 different teachers, of which two were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Four groups of students met with inspectors. Discussions were also held with staff, including senior and middle leaders. A meeting was held with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors. A meeting was also held with two representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 31 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), and of 19 questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors read a range of documents. These included information on the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plan, achievement data, policies and records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Anne Seneviratne, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Solway Community Technology College is an 11 to 16 school situated in the sparsely populated coastal town of Silloth. It is much smaller than average and has a declining roll. There is very high student mobility.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority), is higher than the national average.
- There are no students from minority ethnic groups and only a very small proportion speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students or those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small number of Key Stage 4 students access two sources of alternative provision. These are at Lakes College and West Cumbria Achievement Zone.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by making sure that all teachers:
 - match the level of work to students' prior attainment, to ensure that they all make good progress, particularly the most and least able
 - have high expectations of all students
 - explain clearly, when marking students' work, what they need to do to improve, and give time to reflect and act upon this advice during lessons.
- Improve students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that all students make at least good progress in all their subjects relative to their starting points, particularly in core and additional science
 - setting progress targets for all students which represent high expectations of what they can achieve.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of the school's leadership by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders and governors monitor strategically the quality of teaching and the impact that this is having on students' learning and progress in lessons and across the school
 - ensuring that the leaders of the core subjects monitor teaching and students' progress rigorously and use this information to take the necessary action so that all students in their curriculum areas make good progress.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The positive and caring ethos of this school is tangible. The headteacher's inclusive philosophy, which values each individual, is shared by staff, students and their families. Relationships throughout the school are built on mutual respect. It is clear that the headteacher and her staff have worked hard to improve students' behaviour to create this strong community.
- Leaders have created an environment where every student feels cared for and supported. However, they have not given the same priority to ensuring that all students are challenged to make the best possible progress. Achievement targets for many students, particularly the least able, are not aspirational enough.
- Leaders are not effective enough in the way they monitor the quality of teaching and the impact this is having on students' learning and progress, particularly in the core subjects. The impact of this is magnified further because most classes include students with a wide range of ability and with different learning needs, which are not always met.
- The quality of subject leadership across the school is variable. There are particular concerns in the core subjects, especially science. There is no consistent approach to how subject leaders monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching. Consequently, they are not ensuring that all students are making the best possible progress in their curriculum areas.
- The school's view of its own performance is not sufficiently robust, and, consequently, the judgements are over generous in some areas. The development plan provides a strategic vision for the school. However, there is not enough detail on the specific actions required to bring about continued improvement, and how the impact of these will be evaluated.
- Despite the challenges this small school faces, the curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of the students. Leaders personalise effectively the provision, including off-site opportunities to help students achieve.
- Senior leaders have responded to the area of improvement in the last inspection report about broadening students' knowledge and understanding of other cultures beyond their immediate community. This prepares students well for life in modern Britain. In the last week of the academic year, all students are involved in a range of activities, which include visits to places in different parts of the country of religious significance, such as a Buddhist monastery in Scotland.
- All Key Stage 4 students study a course in comparative religions and the citizenship programme of study includes topics on different cultures and diversity. In the new year, senior leaders are launching the '100 things to do before leaving Solway' booklet to help students broaden their horizons and develop a range of personal and social skills. The ethos of the school gives a high priority to students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- Students have access to effective careers information, advice and guidance from a member of staff in school. The school works with several universities to encourage students to consider going on to higher education. Six Year 10 students recently attended a summer school at the University of Cumbria, Lancaster campus.
- The deputy headteacher, who leads on teaching and learning, has recently introduced initiatives to drive improvements in this area. One example is the new approach to marking and feedback, but this is not embedded across the school. Rigorous systems to monitor accurately the quality of teaching and learning are also not embedded across the school.
- Arrangements for teachers' performance management are robust. There is clear evidence that the headteacher and governors use the performance management process effectively to determine teachers' salary progression.
- Robust policies and procedures for safeguarding students are fully in place and well-established. The business manager, who is responsible for the single central record, is also responsible for finance within the school and clerking for the governing body. She is a key member of the senior leadership team, and her skills ensure that these areas of the school are led and managed very effectively.
- Over recent years, the local authority's level of involvement with the school has been low. They believed that leaders in school had the capacity to bring about further improvements following the last inspection. The headteacher feels that the officer linked to the school is available if she needs her.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors understand that they are there to challenge as much as to support the headteacher and her staff. They do not just rely on what the headteacher tells them is happening in school but find things out for themselves. For example, each governor meets with their link department leader to discuss

students' examination results and they also spend time in lessons. Although they are involved in various activities in school, their approach to monitoring and evaluation is not always strategic enough. Governors know how the pupil premium funding is being spent in school and the impact this is having. They review information on the quality of teaching and ensure that weak teaching is not rewarded through automatic salary progression.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students are proud of their school community. They value the support they receive from the staff and speak highly of the strong relationships between students and staff, which are a hallmark of this school. Students are courteous and welcoming. For example, they hold doors open, not just for visitors, but for staff and each other. Students relate to each other, staff and visitors in a respectful, kind and friendly manner.
- Staff work hard to help students improve their behaviour and students appreciate this. As one Key Stage 4 student said, 'Staff have helped me with my behaviour problems since Year 7.' He then went on to explain the positive impact that this has had. Staff know their students well and can provide individual support to meet their specific needs. One student was keen to tell inspectors, 'Staff have helped me with my confidence and anxiety issues.' This positive attitude of the students was summed up by a Year 7 boy who said, 'I'm glad I came to this school.'
- The rewards and sanctions policy strongly supports the community ethos which permeates all aspects of school life. Students follow the school rules, such as keeping to the left on the corridors. The school environment is clean, tidy and free from graffiti. Older students have responsibilities and look out for their younger peers. These habits of good behaviour have clearly been developed over time and represent what is typical in this school.
- Students spoken to during the inspection say that bullying is rare and, on the few occasions when it does happen, then it is quickly sorted out. They feel that because everyone knows each other, most people challenge bullying if they see it and offer support to each other. They think prejudice-based bullying such as homophobia or transphobia does not happen in school as the culture is very open and welcoming of everyone.
- Staff have worked hard to improve overall attendance and persistent absence figures. The overall attendance figure for the first term of this year was above the national average. Any student absence is followed up rigorously. The work to improve behaviour over recent years has resulted in a significant decline in the number of fixed-term exclusions.
- Students' attitudes to learning are not always as strong as their social behaviour. Although there is very little disruption to learning, in some lessons, a minority of students have to be won over by the teacher at the start of the session. However, when teachers are enthusiastic and engaging, students generally respond well.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. A strength of this school is the way it meets the pastoral needs of its students, particularly those who are vulnerable. All adults who work in school have had the appropriate safeguarding training. All the necessary arrangements have been made to ensure the physical environment is a safe place. All students are taught about internet safety. Safeguarding procedures are clear and well documented, including for those students who are educated off site.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The very small size of the school means that, even in settled arrangements, the ability range of the students is wide. Not all teachers rise to the challenges that this presents. In some lessons, the level of work is not matched to students' prior attainment, which adversely affects the progress that they make. In these lessons, the most and least able students make insufficient progress. For example, they are simply repeating skills which they already know, or are being given work that is far too hard for them. This lack of progress is also evident in some students' books. Students spoken to during the inspection also report that in some lessons everybody is given identical work.
- A scrutiny of students' books and files reveals inconsistencies in both the quality of work and feedback

given through marking. Students are producing a high standard of work when their teachers have high expectations of them. There is also evidence that they are responding well to detailed feedback and this is helping them to make progress. This is particularly the case in art, where an extremely effective ongoing learning dialogue between teacher and student takes place in the assessment books. However, not all teachers have these high expectations. Some teachers are willing to accept untidily presented work of poor quality. In some books, the marking is cursory and students are not responding to feedback.

- Where the quality of teaching is good or better, teachers use their expertise and passion for their subject, coupled with their knowledge of the students, to enthuse and involve them in the lesson. They provide interesting work for the students which is appropriate for their ability. Teachers use a range of assessment throughout the lesson to inform the learning and ensure all students are making good progress.
- Relationships between staff and students are strong, which makes a clear contribution to students' learning. Small class sizes mean that staff and teaching assistants can spend more time responding to individual students' needs. Students are keen to acknowledge how much teachers help them with their learning.
- Many students demonstrate high-level oracy skills. They are reflective and articulate, particularly when talking about their own learning and development. This year has seen an increased focus on encouraging students to read for pleasure. A new library area has been created in school and students have weekly reading sessions during tutor time.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students enter the school with attainment which is generally well below others nationally. Many students make the progress that is expected of them from their different starting points. However, not enough students make better than expected progress. Consequently, attainment measures over time remain below average. Over the last four years, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, has been below the national average with a decline in 2014 from the previous year.
- Students do not achieve well in core and additional science. In the 2014 cohort, only one student attained an A* to C grade. While students' achievement in the separate sciences is more positive, improving teaching and leadership in this curriculum area is a top priority for senior leaders, who have also taken action in response to low achievement in health and social care, religious education and history in 2014.
- In 2014, the proportion of students making expected progress in English and mathematics increased. Standards in English are now in line with the national average, and mathematics is above. The proportion of students making more than expected progress in these subjects remains below the national average.
- The proportion of students in the higher attainment band in all year groups is much lower than the national average. In 2014 there were no students with high prior attainment. Not all teachers are providing sufficient challenge for these most able students. Evidence gathered during the inspection shows that there are occasions where the most able students are simply being asked to repeat skills they already know rather than move on to new learning.
- In 2014, the attainment gap in English between disadvantaged students and other students nationally and within school has narrowed to less than a grade. However, in mathematics, this has widened slightly to just over a grade difference when compared to other students nationally and within school. In English, the progress gap between disadvantaged students and their peers nationally, narrowed considerably. This was also the case in mathematics but to a lesser extent. Leaders in school track how the pupil premium funding is spent and are becoming more effective at evaluating the impact this is having on students' achievement.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is used to enhance the personalised literacy and numeracy support given to students. Year 7 students spoken to during the inspection valued this support and felt it was helping them to make progress and build their confidence.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is above the national average. Meeting the needs of these students is a high priority for school leaders. The very strong relationships which exist between staff and students make a clear contribution to these students' learning. Each individual student who has special educational needs has personalised provision to help them make progress in their learning and development. In 2014, the achievement of these students was variable. The middle-ability students made good progress. However, those with low prior attainment generally did not make the progress which was expected of them.
- The students who access alternative provision off site are following accredited courses which lead to qualifications that are appropriate for their ability. These students who attend Lakes college are very

positive about their experiences. They value the opportunities they have been given and are very appreciative that staff in school have organised these for them. The school's arrangements and protocols for this alternative provision are rigorous and effective.

- In recent years, students were entered for GCSE mathematics early, but this is no longer the case.
- Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that the learning and progress of students currently on roll is variable. Students' work, both in lessons and in their books, shows that not all are making good progress. This is because not all teachers are matching work to students' prior attainment. Progress targets for students do not always represent high enough expectations of what they can achieve.

WHAT INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS MEAN

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	112377
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	444352

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	137
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Professor Simon Pimblott
Headteacher	Lois Baird
Date of previous school inspection	January 2010
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