

# Solway Community Technology College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	112377
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cumbria
<b>Inspection number</b>	337915
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 January 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Peter Cox

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>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	184
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Denise Scott
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Susie Shepherd
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 May 2007
<b>School address</b>	Liddell Street Silloth Wigton CA7 4DD
<b>Telephone number</b>	01697 331234
<b>Fax number</b>	01697 332749
<b>Email address</b>	office@solway.cumbria.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

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E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons of 25 minutes each, which represented seeing a very large majority of the teachers; and held meetings with the chair of governors, staff and groups of students. Telephone interviews were held with the School Improvement Partner and a senior school improvement officer from the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents, including governing body meeting minutes, the school development plan and the school's monitoring records of teaching and learning. An analysis was made of the 48 questionnaire responses returned from parents and carers.

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

- how well the school was doing in securing the improvements seen in attainment and achievement since 2007
- what is preventing students performing as well in English and mathematics as in some other subjects
- the quality and accuracy of the systems used by the school to monitor the progress of students and the accuracy of the targets set for them
- what the school is doing to motivate the higher proportion of boys to achieve their best.

## Information about the school

The school lies at the heart of its community serving the town of Silloth and the surrounding rural areas. It is a small school where all students who attend are of White British heritage. There are more boys than girls and a higher proportion of students with special educational needs and/or learning difficulties than average. The school is a part of the Rural Academy, a collaborative group which comprises several small rural secondary schools in Cumbria. The school is currently experiencing some long-term absence of subject leaders. It has specialist technology college status.

**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

This is a good school that has made significant and secure improvements since the last inspection. Its small size is appreciated by the students and their parents and carers who speak of it being a 'family' and where each student is known individually. One parent summed up the feelings of many saying, 'My child is happy and confident... small is best!' Teachers are enthusiastic, knowledgeable in their subjects and structure their lessons very well. Time is not wasted and learning progresses at a good pace.

Relationships between adults and students are strong; students benefit from the caring support shown by the teachers and other adults.

Students do much better than expected because of the good teaching. However, attainment in mathematics and to a lesser extent in English is less impressive than in other practical subjects. While students do well when compared to their starting points, the school continually endeavours to secure improved rates of progress. The curriculum matches the skills, abilities and aspirations of students well. The school listens to students carefully and shapes the curriculum to ensure that they get the best from their time in school. A range of vocational courses, complemented by the popular and successful technology subjects, provide enjoyment and good levels of engagement in learning; this is helping close the gap between boys' attainment and that of girls.

Students behave well and learn in a safe, harmonious and stimulating environment. Their work is displayed around the school; some items are contained in a cabinet with easy access but these go untouched, as do bags and coats left in designated places. There is a strong community feel to the school; the mixed-aged tutor groups and the 'house' system have helped promote competition and friendly rivalry across the year groups. The school recognises that more is to be done to strengthen students' knowledge and understanding of other communities.

The headteacher has been the driving force behind the improvements since the last inspection. The school knows itself well and has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Much has been achieved, including improvements in attainment, achievement, attendance and the quality of teaching. This track record of improvement by the headteacher, ably supported by senior colleagues who, as a team, are focused on continual advance, demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement.

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

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics by:
  - providing challenging work in lessons which matches the ability range of

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students

- providing more opportunities for independent learning.
- Broaden students' knowledge and understanding of other cultures beyond their immediate community by:
  - providing more opportunities for them to visit other places and experience different cultures
  - strengthening the curriculum to develop students' awareness of communities within the north of England and nationally.

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

Students arrive at the school with attainment that is well below average. As a consequence of the good progress in learning seen in lessons, and over time in their work, good behaviour, attitudes and enjoyment of school, they leave with attainment that is broadly in line with the national average. Provisional results for 2009 show that the proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades in GCSE, including English and mathematics, was 1% above the national average. All students left school with five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to G, while the percentage of students leaving with grades C or above was slightly less when compared with the national picture. Performance in subjects is variable and less strong in mathematics than in English. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress in line with their peers due to the individual attention given to address their needs. The trend over time since 2006 shows improvement apart from a dip in attainment in 2007, due largely to the underperformance of boys. This has been resolved by the school by careful monitoring of progress of all students resulting in the early identification of underachievers and robust strategies put in place to support them.

A recent school survey recorded a very large majority of students saying they felt safe in school; the inspection findings support this. Almost all students understand the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle and they make good choices when selecting food options and when taking up the wide range of sporting activities. Participation rates in sport are high and a very large majority of students have a school lunch.

Students enthusiastically engage in opportunities to take on roles of responsibility within school such as mentors, sports leaders and lead learners in helping others to develop. This helps embed the culture of achievement and an atmosphere of trust and respect that permeates the school. The specialism has helped develop links with the local farming community through the 'Food for Life' partnership and junior master-chef competitions with the local Rotary Club. Members of the local community appreciate the work of the school and the engagement with the town and its facilities. One person expressed pride in the school's improvements in attainment and the way that the students interact positively with their community.

Students apply and develop their basic skills throughout their time at school preparing them well for the next stages of education and work. Social, moral and spiritual

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development is effective and supports the strong relationships seen and the good behaviour in lessons and around the school. Students have a clear understanding of their own culture through the Year 7 'Opening minds' lessons and appreciate their Cumbrian heritage, but there is limited understanding of other cultures beyond that of their own.

*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>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>3</b>

### How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding; no teaching is inadequate. The use of data to inform planning and increase the expectations of students is a strong feature in the majority of lessons, although a more detailed and planned approach to meet the different abilities within a class is yet to be established. Teachers monitor learning well, they often ask probing questions to assess students' understanding and make regular enquiries of groups and individuals to check on progress and re-direct where necessary. The curriculum is a strength and, along with better teaching, has helped underpin improvements. It very accurately meets the needs of the students and is constantly under review. Partnerships with the Rural Academy, the University of Cumbria and other

<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.

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schools help in the delivery of a wide choice of subjects, some related to the school's specialism and the local community such as catering and tourism.

Every child is known by all adults and each one matters. Support for vulnerable students is good and the deployment of a specialist teaching assistant is well received.

Partnerships with outside agencies are effective. Arrangements for those new to the school are good and guidance for those choosing subjects to take in Key Stage 4 appropriate. Careers guidance, including help on further education routes, is effective and has increased the proportion of students taking up education or training after age 16.

*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?**

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Senior leaders have been affected by long-term absences of some key subject leaders. They have called on willing colleagues who share the school's ambition and have risen to the challenge of providing continuity in driving improvements forward. Target setting and the monitoring of progress are accurate and thorough. The reliable data shows that the school is on course to exceed its targets in 2010. Governors provide satisfactory challenge and direction to the school, although not all governors share responsibilities. Opportunities are provided for all and the attainment gap between boys and girls is closing. The necessity of all senior staff to teach allows them to know the students well and to share the responsibility of promoting students' learning and progress with other committed teachers. This creates a tight-knit school community and one which is supportive and caring of each other. This helps ensure effective community cohesion within the school and locally. The school recognises the need to develop students' understanding of living in multicultural Britain. Safeguarding procedures are in place and meet current government guidelines at this time.

*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

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<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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

### **Views of parents and carers**

Over one quarter of parents and carers responded to the questionnaires. They are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They hold the headteacher in high regard and appreciate the improvements made. They acknowledge the benefits of Solway being a small school and the individual care shown to their children. The inspectors' response to their concerns is reflected, where appropriate, in judgements made in the relevant sections of the report.



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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Solway Community 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 inspector received 48 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 184 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	16	33	30	63	2	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	21	44	24	50	3	6	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	42	23	48	3	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	38	28	58	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	21	44	25	52	2	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	27	31	65	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	33	30	63	1	2	0	0
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)	21	44	24	50	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	42	27	56	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	35	21	44	10	21	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	31	29	60	4	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	23	48	22	46	2	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	22	46	23	48	2	4	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 its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><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 pupil's 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.**



26 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Solway Community Technology College, Wigton CA7 4DD

Thank you for making us welcome in your school when we came to inspect it recently. We were all very impressed by your behaviour and kind offers of showing us around your school of which you are very proud. We judge Solway to be a good school. The teachers have made many improvements since the last time inspectors visited, including in your attendance, the quality of teaching you receive and the rate in which you progress in your learning. You and your parents and carers have helped make this possible by coming to school regularly, arriving on time and being ready and willing to learn. Well done and we hope you continue with this.

We have asked the governors, your headteacher and staff to do a couple of things to help make your school even better.

- To increase the numbers of those of you who get good results in English and mathematics. You already do well considering what you can do when you first arrive at the school, but we think you can do even better, matching the performances in some of the practical subjects you do. We have asked that the teachers plan your lessons even more thoroughly making sure that you all achieve as well as you can and help develop your own learning skills.
- To provide you with more opportunities in school and beyond to understand the different cultures in the United Kingdom that make up the rich society in which we live.

Thanks again and I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Peter Cox

Lead Inspector

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