

Inspection of a good school: Dartford Science & Technology College

Heath Lane, Dartford, Kent DA1 2LY

Inspection dates:

15 and 16 March 2022

Outcome

Dartford Science & Technology College continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Dartford Science & Technology College is a welcoming and friendly school. There is a strong sense of community, based on excellent relationships between staff, pupils and parents. The school is a safe space for pupils to learn and develop as young citizens. One parent summed this up by describing it as 'secure, supportive and encouraging.'

Pupils are encouraged to develop their own unique character and independence during their time at school. This is taught explicitly, both inside and outside the classroom. Sixth-form students play an active part in the life of the school. For example, they help lead clubs and provide strong role models to younger pupils.

Leaders set demanding standards for what pupils should learn and by when. However, some pupils, especially in Years 8 and 9, have missed out on parts of their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers know this and are making up for lost ground quickly.

The school has high expectations of pupils' behaviour, with strong systems to manage it. As a result, pupils behave very well. There is very little disruption to learning. Staff deal with any concerns about bullying quickly and fairly.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

School leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum which prepares pupils well for adult life. It contains a strong element which is designed to support character development. Pupils regularly debate important social and moral questions. Sixth-form courses prepare students well for the next steps in education and employment through virtual work experience and university links.

Pupils study a broad range of academic subjects in key stage 4. However very few take a language. As a result, the proportion achieving the full set of English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects falls short of the government's ambition. Leaders are taking action to improve this, so that pupils' future prospects are not limited.

Leaders ensure that all subjects encourage deep and independent thinking. Department leaders plan this into the curriculum well. They introduce pupils to simple skills and knowledge first to build secure foundations. Later, teachers add more complicated ideas. For example, in English, Year 8 pupils look at how to do a simple character study based on Shakespeare's plays. In Year 11, they use these skills to investigate more-complex characters in Macbeth. Looking back over time, one pupil described this as 'building a better base for your learning'.

Teachers have detailed subject knowledge. Leaders ensure that teachers share this expertise with their colleagues. This builds even greater specialism in subjects. Sixth-form students benefit particularly from this. Year 12 students are taught how to solve very advanced mathematical problems. In English they are able to make high-level comparisons of different literary genres.

Leaders streamline assessment to reduce unnecessary burdens on staff and pupils. Teachers keep a careful overview of pupils' understanding. Teaching is adapted effectively to give pupils extra help when needed. They learn useful techniques to remember key facts. As a result, many pupils can recall knowledge fluently and use it to produce high-quality work.

Robust systems support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders use primary school records and their own checks to see who needs help. Staff work alongside pupils in lessons and in 'the hub' to spot exactly where pupils need support and to identify the best way to offer it. Pupils help to produce their own learning plans so that they feel more actively involved in their own development.

Leaders arrange well-crafted programmes for pupils who need extra help with their reading. Sixth-form reading mentors help younger pupils to catch up. The partial closure of the school during the pandemic slowed progress in reading for some key stage 3 pupils. Once school reopened fully, leaders assigned their most experienced teachers to make up this lost learning. These pupils are now making much faster progress, but they still have some gaps.

Governors and leaders place a high priority on pupils' broader development. Pupils get strong careers advice at the right time to help them to make informed choices. A very high proportion of sixth-form students go on to higher education or into work with training. Strong student leadership programmes encourage the qualities that pupils will need as adults. ICE (individual character education) lessons highlight current affairs and moral questions very successfully.

Although clubs were disrupted by the pandemic, many are now running again. Sixth-form students often lead clubs for younger pupils and act as role models. Leaders check attendance at clubs and make sure that no groups of pupils are missing out.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is very well led and managed. Governors provide expert oversight. Leaders are experienced and knowledgeable. They have strong links with the local community. Leaders work well with agencies to get help for their pupils when needed.

Leaders ensure all staff follow procedures and are alert to safeguarding risks. They administer rigorous employment checks. Staff keep accurate records.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in the modern world, including when online. The school keeps its pupils safe and secure. Pupils know who they can talk to if they have a problem.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- During the pandemic, some pupils in key stage 3 have fallen behind in their reading. As a result, they have gaps in their knowledge which will undermine future learning. Leaders should ensure that all pupils catch up so that they have the reading skills they need to access their full curriculum.
- The proportion of pupils taking the full set of subjects that make up the EBacc, and in particular those taking a language, is well below the government's ambition. This may limit pupils' future prospects. Leaders should ensure that the proportion of pupils choosing the full set of EBacc subjects continues to rise.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2017.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	118785
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10210476
Type of school	Secondary modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	861
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	115
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair of governing body	Geoffrey Prout
Principal	Anne Davis
Website	http://www.dstc.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 and 8 March 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a small, non-selective school in a town with selective schools.
- A very small number of pupils attend a registered provider of alternative provision.
- The school has a science and technology curriculum specialism.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal and her senior leadership team. The lead inspector met governors and trustees, as well as a representative of the local authority.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector also visited some lessons in other subjects, including a selection of sixth-form lessons. He met with small groups of pupils and some sixth-form students.
- The lead inspector studied the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the central record of employment checks. He also met the school's safeguarding lead and spoke to different staff to explore how well safeguarding referral systems work.
- Inspectors visited assembly and tutor times. The lead inspector visited the school's hub as well as the school library. Inspectors observed pupils around the school at break and lunchtimes.
- The lead inspector spoke by telephone to a senior manager of the alternative provision used by the school.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed by parents, staff and pupils via Ofsted's surveys.
- The lead inspector examined other school documents and checked the information that is available on the school's website.

Inspection team

Keith Pailthorpe, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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