



# Sir John Talbot's Technology College

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 123588  
**Local Authority** Shropshire  
**Inspection number** 296522  
**Inspection dates** 21–22 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Michael Smith HMI

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>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Tilstock Road
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Whitchurch
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		SY13 2BY
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01948 660600
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	624	<b>Fax number</b>	01948 660610
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	74		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Don Pearce
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Rhiannon Taylor
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 October 2005		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	21–22 November 2006	296522

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Sir John Talbot's is a smaller than average school and technology college serving the market town of Whitchurch and surrounding villages. The school was given a Notice to Improve in 2005. This report is the outcome of a re-inspection.

The school is an 'Extended School', working in partnership with Whitchurch Junior and Infants schools. The proportion of students eligible for free meals is below average but there are areas of deprivation locally. The percentage of students with learning difficulties is average, and a high proportion of these students have statements specifying their need for additional support. The vast majority of students come from White British backgrounds and a very small number are learning English as an additional language.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The school has improved significantly since the previous inspection and inspectors agree that its overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Standards and the provision within the sixth form are now satisfactory and show the commitment of the leadership to improve. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Students generally feel safe in school. The satisfactory care and support ensure that they can respond to the effective guidance on how to improve. Students are set learning targets and given support to achieve them and this helps them make satisfactory progress. However, systems in place are not consistently used across the school and some students are not aware of their targets. Healthy living is understood by students who respond accordingly, participating in the sporting opportunities available, and taking up healthy eating options. However, far too many students smoke and this has an adverse impact upon their health.

Students' enjoyment in coming to school is variable and attendance is satisfactory. The school has worked hard to improve behaviour and has clear systems to improve classroom management, including an inclusion centre. However, the impact of these is not consistent and students and parents comment that too often lessons are disrupted by a small group of students whose behaviour is inappropriate and detrimental to the learning of others. Teaching is generally satisfactory and often better, especially when subject leaders have closely monitored the work of the department and identified and improved areas. The curriculum has been improved and is satisfactory. It includes more appropriate courses to enthuse and better prepare students for life beyond school.

The school makes effective use of its specialist status to enhance the curriculum through work with local schools and industry, including success in a variety of competitions. It has increased opportunities for students to develop their thinking skills and improved the provision for information and communication technology (ICT). However, ICT is not used effectively and consistently by subjects across the curriculum to enhance the students' work. Extended provision is instrumental in improving links with local schools and extending opportunities for gifted and talented students.

Standards are slightly below average and students make satisfactory progress from entering the school. However, students with learning difficulties consistently make less progress than their peers. The school is not complacent and leadership at all levels is focused on raising standards, in particular by looking at ways to ensure all students complete coursework elements of their work and to help them with their study skills. The school and students make a good contribution to the community by involving adults in enhancing their ICT skills and working with local firms in developing use of modern technologies.

The very good support from the local authority (LA) has been very well received by the school and, along with the effective leadership of the headteacher, has been instrumental in improving the quality of leadership and management, teaching and

learning, and the provision within the sixth form. Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. At all levels they are more accurate and secure in evaluating the effectiveness of the school. Clear and well defined systems for monitoring and evaluation have been used effectively to improve standards and provision in a number of curriculum areas. However, much of the work is in its early days of implementation and it is not always possible to evaluate its full impact. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

Although the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, its performance in a few respects is inadequate. Before its next section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor the progress that it has made in remedying these weaknesses. The school would receive two to five days notice of such a visit.

### **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

#### **Grade: 3**

Provision within the sixth form has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. The very focused scrutiny, support and improved leadership have meant that teaching and learning, personal development and care, guidance and support are now good.

Students are involved in charity work. They enjoy helping younger students by coaching them in a sport or helping them to improve their reading. One girl said, 'I like hearing students read as it is so satisfying when you see them improving.' Students are appreciative of teachers who give generously of their time outside lessons to help them with their work. Individual progress discussions lead them to gain in self confidence and improve. Retention rates have risen, showing that students are satisfied with the courses they are following. Although the curriculum is adequate, courses for lower attainers are not yet fully developed. Standards have risen and are now broadly average.

Leadership and management have improved and are now satisfactory. Close monitoring of the provision within the sixth form has ensured students now make at least satisfactory progress and closer scrutiny of the courses offered have ensured the sixth form now gives value for money.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the standard of behaviour by reducing incidents of disruption by a minority of students.
- Raise standards by ensuring all students, particularly those with learning difficulties, achieve to the best of their ability.
- Improve standards in ICT across the curriculum by ensuring all subjects make appropriate use of ICT to enhance learning.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

Students enter the school at the age of eleven with below average standards. They make satisfactory progress and attain below average standards at the end of Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3, results in mathematics and science improved in 2006 from the 2005 levels but English results fell from above average in 2005 to below average.

At Key Stage 4, results in 2006 failed to consolidate the significant improvement made in 2005 and fell back to levels similar to those in 2004. Results for boys, and for lower attaining boys in particular, were poorer than girls. Students with learning difficulties made less progress than their peers but looked-after children significantly improved their achievements from the time they started at the school until they took their GCSE examinations.

The school strives to meet its challenging targets, including those for a technology school, and it has been successful with about half of these in 2006.

A level and A/S level results improved significantly and are now satisfactory showing the impact of the work the school has been doing to raise standards in the sixth form. Students make satisfactory progress. However, the take up of students in the sixth form has not yet had the opportunity to increase in response to the improved provision and results.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

Personal development and well-being are good in the sixth form and satisfactory overall. Students generally enjoy school and they make positive contributions to the community through the school council, raising funds for charity, and acting as mentors. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students work well together in groups when they are given the opportunity. They deepen their knowledge of other cultures in subjects such as art, and on educational visits which enhance learning and extend students' horizons.

Students generally show positive attitudes towards their work. Attendance is in line with national averages with the school swiftly following up dips in attendance and investigating any unexplained absences. The school has set up an inclusion unit and instigated a well planned programme to improve the classroom management of students and their behaviour. Although this has shown to be effective, it is still in its very early days of implementation and both parents and students are rightly concerned about behaviour which is unsatisfactory overall because a small group of students are disruptive in lessons.

Students' preparation for life after school is good and is enhanced by work experience, enterprise initiatives, making good use of the opportunities offered through technology school status, and extended work placements.

Students understand the importance of keeping themselves safe and healthy. They are keen to adopt healthy lifestyles and participate in a good range of sporting activities and clubs. They appreciate, and often take up, the healthy options available in the dining hall and the opportunities they have had to influence the food available. However, despite the school's efforts to sanction and discourage smoking, a significant minority of students persist in smoking in the school grounds and on their way to and from the school.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and good in sixth form. Lessons are generally well structured, with effective starters. Learning objectives are made clear from the start so that students know what is expected of them and conclusions at the end of lessons are used effectively to consolidate learning. Classes are usually well managed so students' learning is uninterrupted, except where a small number of students misbehave and disrupt lessons. However, resources are not always well suited to students' abilities, particularly for the lower attainers who make inadequate progress. Lessons are sometimes too teacher led, with limited opportunities for students to develop independent skills and to become more actively involved in their learning. By contrast, in the sixth form lessons teachers often give good opportunities for independent learning skills to be practised and facilitate good small group work.

Teachers often give students well focused individual attention and mark work well to help students improve. However, not all marking guides students on how to get better or is sometimes superficial and unhelpful. Good use is made of ICT to enhance learning in some lessons but this is not consistent across all subjects.

Students' attitudes and relationships with teachers are generally good and often better in sixth form lessons. Teaching is often good and occasionally outstanding, particularly when work is varied to help students concentrate and to challenge them, whatever their level of ability.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory and for years 10 and 11 gives greater flexibility than before. This has resulted in a curriculum that provides appropriate vocational experiences and qualifications for specific groups of students, including experience in the workplace.

and enhancing their Key Skills. It also helps to prepare them for future work and training opportunities. Good use is made of twilight courses which enhance the experiences of higher attaining students.

The recent 'Learn to Learn' course for Years 7 and 8 is having a positive impact on students' working methods and understanding across subjects and this is enhanced by work within science to concentrate on students' thinking skills. Good use is made of distance learning and video conferencing to widen the options available in the sixth form and to ensure better value for money. There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities with good sports sessions, GCSE help groups, and opportunities to work with primary school children. Although good in the sixth form, the take up of some of these is not substantial overall.

The school has made effective use of technology school status to enhance the curriculum by offering additional options in technology at GCSE and to extend the vocational options to include ICT. However, ICT across the curriculum is not well established and not used effectively to enhance the learning in all subjects.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form. The school provides good pastoral support for students with particular difficulties and has very effective links with other agencies who give specialist support and guidance. Students feel that they can turn to staff if they are worried or upset. The school pays due attention to health and safety and child protection procedures. Good use is made of extended school and specialist school status to enhance work with partner primary schools and to enhance procedures when students transfer at the age of 11. Similar good support is available for students when they leave school for further or higher education or the world of work.

Students say that staff deal with incidents of bullying, but are not always effective in preventing it recurring. The school is aware of this concern and is currently surveying students and parents to review its procedures. Students do not receive enough guidance about what they need to do to improve their work. A computerised system, which enables teachers to have access to more information about students' attainment, has recently been installed and staff are beginning to use this data to identify where students are not making the progress they should. Suitable intervention programmes to tackle this underachievement are being developed but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these strategies.

Support for students with learning difficulties or disabilities is improving but is not yet having sufficient impact on achievement. Systems to track the progress of these students have recently been implemented and their effectiveness is currently being evaluated. Not all teachers are confident in planning work to meet the needs of these students and hence progress is often not as good as it should be.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The local authority, in conjunction with the headteacher, has been very effective in ensuring that the leadership and management have improved and are now satisfactory. The LA has given a clear lead and set expectations within the school. Leadership at all levels, and governors, effectively monitor the provision within the school and contribute to a secure self-evaluation. This is used to formulate an appropriate school improvement plan and shows the school has a secure capacity to improve further.

The school has introduced an effective system to evaluate curriculum areas. Subject leaders with link governors and a member of the senior management team review the effectiveness of the departments, including getting feedback from students, and then make appropriate recommendations for improvement. Early reviews have been very successful in identifying good practice to disseminate and in overcoming barriers to students learning.

Governors hold the school to account and ensure they have a good overview of what is happening within it.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	4	2
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	3	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

We visited your school recently and we met some of you before school and at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were very pleased with the friendliness you showed us and how helpful you were. We feel that your school has made good progress since the previous inspection and it no longer requires significant improvement.

Your teachers support you and offer you effective guidance and this helps you make satisfactory progress in the school and helps you gain generally satisfactory results in your examinations. Council members told me how it can influence what happens in the school, for example changes to the uniform. Teaching is generally satisfactory but with a significant number of lessons being good or better, particularly in the sixth form. The curriculum is now more appropriate for your needs and you also take part in a variety of extra-curricular activities.

Many of you have a very good understanding of what you need to do to become healthy and you thought the school helped you. However, too many of you smoke and this is having a very poor impact upon your health. Behaviour is an issue. Most of you behave well but a significant number behave badly and this is unfairly disrupting the education of your friends and fellow students. These are areas in which you can help your school get better. This will help you as you get older and enable you to make better use of the effective support and guidance provided.

Your school is effectively led and managed and it ensures it gains the views of yourselves and your parents to see how it can improve further, including your input into subject reviews. Like all schools there are things which can be improved. We feel that the school should work to raise standards, particularly for students with learning difficulties, and to improve the use of ICT across all subject areas and to work with you to improve behaviour.

We wish you well in this improving and supportive school and thank you again for your cooperation.