

Brockhill Park Performing Arts College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137458
Local authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	386081
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2012
Lead inspector	Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Modern (non-selective)
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,249
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Hill
Principal	Sonette Schwartz
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 November 2008
School address	Sandling Road Saltwood Hythe CT21 4HL
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Age group	11–19
Inspection date(s)	12–13 January 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Additional inspector

Karen Kerridge

Additional inspector

Lesley Leak

Additional inspector

George Rayner

Additional inspector

Clifford Walker

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed different aspects of the school's work including 46 lessons involving 44 teachers and an assembly. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, and looked at planning documents including those relating to safeguarding, students' assessment information and work. They held discussions with members of the governing body, staff and groups of students, and analysed questionnaires from 133 parents and carers, and looked at others from staff and students.

Information about the school

The roll in this larger-than-average school has risen steadily since the previous inspection. The school is set in parkland, houses a working farm and theatre and holds specialist status for the rural dimension and for performing arts. It operates within a selective area where approximately a quarter of pupils attend grammar schools for their secondary education. Most students are of White British heritage, with an increasing number from other ethnic backgrounds, including a few who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and students with a disability is well above that found nationally. The proportion of students who join or leave the school at times other than the usual time is higher than in most schools. The school holds a number of national awards, including International School, Healthy Schools status and National School of Creativity recognition, in addition to awards for sport and the performing arts. The school has met the government's current floor targets for academic performance.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school with a positive learning ethos which is raising students' aspirations. They develop well academically and personally, and are prepared well for the next stage of their lives. The school's specialist status has a significant impact on students' experiences. They achieve particularly well in performing arts subjects, and the farm is a popular aspect of school life and provides access to additional vocational qualifications.
- Students' attainment in GCSE, AS and A-level is in line with national averages and has increased year on year since the previous inspection. This represents good progress from students' below-average starting points. Recent developments to enable students to improve their literacy and numeracy skills are having a positive impact but are not yet promoted sufficiently in all subjects.
- The sixth form is good, shown in rapidly increasing numbers as the curriculum is extended to meet a wider range of students' interests and abilities.
- Teaching is good. Occasionally, the matching of work to students' prior attainment and abilities and marking are not as strong as in the majority of lessons.
- Good behaviour is the norm. Students comment on improved attitudes in the last few years so that they are proud of their school, want to do well and appreciate that adults take an interest in them. They do not always present their work with care because teachers have not made their expectations sufficiently clear.
- Leadership and management are good. The school is very effectively led by the Principal, and senior and middle leaders have an accurate understanding of the most important areas for development. The school has improved well since the previous inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further by accelerating the steps being taken to promote students' literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects.

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

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by identifying and sharing the most effective practice and ensuring that all teachers:
 - mark students' work regularly and give them precise guidance about how their work could be improved, including presentation, and further opportunities to follow up on the guidance given
 - set work at a level which closely matches students' needs and abilities.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students' attainment on entry is below average because most higher-attaining pupils attend grammar schools in the area. By the time students leave school, either at the end of Year 11 or in the sixth form, attainment is in line with national averages, showing the good progress they make through the school. As a result, the proportion of students who enter further education, training or employment on leaving school is well above the national rate. Although there are variations in individual lessons, observations during the inspection confirmed that good learning takes place across the school. Students respond well to the clear focus on improving their academic achievement, and this is reflected in the positive responses in the student and parental questionnaires. This is seen in students' readiness for learning when they enter the classroom. A relative weakness relates to students' presentation of their work. In some books, although students record the learning objective routinely, untidy and disorganised written work makes it difficult for them to use it to reflect on what they have learned. The most effective learning takes place when students are actively involved in group work, broadening their perspectives as they articulate and share their thinking with others. In a few lessons, including in the sixth form, students have to listen to the teacher for too long or gain information from handouts rather than consolidate their thinking through discussion.

Students' prior achievement has been stronger in English than in mathematics and science, but recent changes in teaching and the curriculum are addressing this well and performance across the subjects is closing rapidly. Students' progress is closely tracked so that any loss of momentum is identified quickly and action taken, such as one-to-one tuition. Because each student is treated as an individual and interventions are carefully focused, groups of students, such as girls and boys, different attainment groups, those with disabilities and those who have special educational needs, all make good progress and there is good evidence to show that progress between different groups is similar across the school. Students have positive attitudes to learning and gain a momentum in their learning as they move through the school. Progress is faster in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3 (Years 7 and 8 in this school). However, teachers have raised their aspirations of students' achievement in Year 7 through recent initiatives with local primary schools. In the sixth form, the improved curriculum with a wider range of vocational courses has led to more students staying on or joining from other schools. Their achievement has improved rapidly over the last three years and the school's data show this pattern is set to continue. Performance is particularly strong in the school's specialist performing arts subjects.

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

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Quality of teaching

The inspection findings of good teaching match the school's own assessments and are supported by positive parental and student views. The warm relationships and rapport between teachers and students, often sharing humour, support learning well. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to plan lessons which engage students, and in-depth questioning strengthens students' understanding effectively. The initiative this academic year to improve the use of group work has been very successful, and students gain greatly from the opportunities to talk through their ideas and to present and share their views with others in the class. Students are effectively encouraged to be reflective, to think things through for themselves and to take responsibility for their own learning, such as when they are given some choice about the level of work to be attempted. For example, this is a common feature of mathematics lessons and is contributing successfully to improved progress and attainment in the subject. Students make realistic choices because teachers give regular guidance about subject and examination criteria so that students have a good understanding of the level of their work. There is some good practice in marking, for example in English, which guides students' improvement but this is inconsistent so that some marking merely acknowledges that work has been completed. Students are rarely required to follow up quickly on the suggestions made for improvement to check their understanding. In a few lessons, most often in mixed-ability classes, work is not always sufficiently well matched to students' abilities and prior attainment, which occasionally limits the progress made by the most-able students. Teaching assistants are deployed well and are proactive and effective in giving extra support to students who need it.

Students find the curriculum with early GCSE entry and options being taken from Year 9 motivating, particularly in their study of vocational subjects. Until this academic year, the most-able students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form have had limited opportunities to follow challenging academic pathways, for example to choose GCSE subjects meeting the English Baccalaureate requirements. This weakness is being effectively addressed through the systematic introduction of further courses as staff develop the relevant expertise. Recent developments to screen students' reading abilities and whole-school events promoting the application of numeracy are providing a valuable foundation for further development. Currently, although many teachers promote literacy and numeracy skills within their subjects, the school's approach has not been brought together into a coherent and well-understood approach. Teaching promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, for example improving their own and other's performance in dance and drama, reflecting on inequalities in the world in history and geography, civil rights in citizenship or in developing a first-hand understanding of food production in the school farm. Consequently, students are aware, and tolerant, of difference.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

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Behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is invariably good and often better. Adults instil high expectations for courtesy, for example when listening to the teacher or fellow students, so that an ethos of consideration for others pervades the school and contributes well to the good learning in lessons. Sixth-form students are positive role models for younger students. Consequently, students feel safe and understand issues about their own safety. This was seen in a lesson, for example, when students reflected maturely on their understanding of surveillance cameras around the school as a means of protection, and issues of cyber-bullying are addressed robustly in assemblies. A few parents raised concerns about some less considerate behaviour in Key Stage 3. The school is aware that there has been minor disruption to learning in a few lessons, and is rigorously addressing the issue. The school has considerable success in integrating a number of students who have behavioural difficulties and have not been successful in their earlier educational careers. Students are usually punctual to lessons, showing a sense of urgency to learning which is challenging given the widespread nature of the school site. Incidents of bullying and racism are rare. A sustained emphasis on improving attendance, identified as a weakness in the last inspection, has brought about considerable improvement and reduced persistent absence.

Leadership and management

The Principal, leadership team and governing body have an ambitious vision for the school and there is a unity of purpose across the school as a whole. The Principal is well regarded by staff, students and parents and carers and they feel involved in what the school is trying to achieve. Issues of underperformance have been addressed robustly and teachers are enthused by the programme of professional development because they see improvements in students' achievement. The rate of change and improvements, particularly in students' attainment in English and mathematics, show the school's ongoing capacity to improve further. The curriculum is good, as is the school's promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school promotes a broad curriculum to meet the differing needs and abilities of students and to place it within its local context. For example, the Key Stage 3 'great outdoors' programme includes rural and arable geography, while the Key Stage 4 curriculum includes aspects of farm management on the school's farm and gardens. The school effectively uses its links with two other local schools to broaden provision for students requiring alternative vocational courses. Enrichment education is strong, with many students participating in clubs and events such as Young Farmers and performances in school and within the community. Governance is a clear strength, with the governing body supporting and challenging the school in equal measure. It ensures effective systems for students' safety and security, including those relating to child protection. The school's ethos, range of facilities and the match of the curriculum to students' needs ensure good equality of opportunity so that any differences in the performance of groups are minimal.

Glossary

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.
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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



16 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Brockhill Park Performing Arts College, Hythe CT21 4HL

I am writing to let you know the outcome of the recent inspection. Thank you for the welcome you gave us. We have judged that yours is a good school. We share your views that improvements are ongoing and are making the school increasingly effective. The school farm and performing arts specialism make the school a special place and everyone in the school is given the opportunity to succeed. The GCSE and sixth form results have improved well and are in line with those found nationally, which means that you are making good progress. Your progress in mathematics and science is still a little slower than in English but you are closing the gap rapidly. The Principal and staff do a good job in ensuring that your progress is checked regularly and that you are helped to understand the quality of your work. Your good behaviour and readiness to learn make an important contribution to good learning in lessons. Most importantly, you enjoy school, are proud of all that it offers and feel exceptionally safe. Your attendance has improved but it is still too low for a few students, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

The Principal, senior team and staff are united in knowing how to make the school even better. This gives the inspection team every confidence that the school will continue to improve. We have asked the Principal and the staff to address some areas that should help to improve your attainment and progress, by:

- finding more ways to develop your literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects
- making sure that more of your work is marked regularly and that you are always given precise guidance about how your work and presentation could be improved, and that you have to follow up quickly on the guidance given
- setting work at a level which closely matches your needs and abilities so that you do not lose any momentum in your learning.

Thank you again for your help during the inspection. We are confident that you will all continue to give of your best, and wish you well in your future studies. If you are one of the few who are often absent, please do try to attend more regularly as this will help you to do better.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings
Lead inspector

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