

Midhurst Rother College

North Street, Midhurst, GU29 9DT

Inspection dates

1–2 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students' achievement is outstanding. They enter the college with levels of attainment that are below average. By the end of Year 11 their GCSE results are well above average.
- Students progress rapidly in Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form. This includes disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language.
- Students who benefit from the pupil premium make excellent progress and the gap between their progress and that of other students is narrowing rapidly.
- Nearly two thirds of the teaching is outstanding. Students enjoy being in college, and staff enjoy teaching them. The leadership of teaching, and management of performance, are highly effective.
- Students' behaviour around the college is exemplary. They are courteous and considerate, making the college a calm and orderly place at all times.
- Racial abuse and bullying are exceptionally rare. Attitudes to learning are very positive in lessons, and students say that they feel very safe in the college.
- College leaders have the welfare and development of each individual student at the heart of their work.
- Leaders, managers and governors work most effectively together to make sure that teaching continues to improve, and have had a considerable impact on raising students' achievement.
- Sixth form students benefit from outstanding teaching, leadership, and pastoral support, and gain examination grades that are in the top 25 per cent nationally.
- An excellent curriculum and promotion of students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development mean that their interests and aspirations are met.
- Monitoring of students' progress is carried out rigorously, and supports the drive for further improvement across the college.
- The governing body gives an excellent balance of challenge and support to the college through careful review of all its activities.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 33 lessons, of which 17 were joint observations with a member of the college’s senior leadership team.
- They examined students’ books during lessons, and on a series of short visits to lessons in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors held discussions with the Principal, staff, senior leaders and leaders of subjects and other aspects of the college’s work, as well as with three groups of students. They also met with a group of members of the local governing body, including the Chair.
- Inspectors took account of 69 responses to the on-line Parent View survey, and 58 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- They looked at key documents, including the school’s self-evaluation, minutes of meetings, information about safeguarding, the college’s own data on students’ progress, and records of behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

David Lewis, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Alan Jarvis	Additional Inspector
Jane Guest	Additional Inspector
Genevieve Usher	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Midhurst Rother College is a smaller than average-sized college for students aged 11–18 which serves the market town of Midhurst in West Sussex and surrounding areas. At its last inspection by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory.
- The College is sponsored by United Learning and opened in January 2009.
- The great majority of students are of White British heritage, and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (those known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after students and any with a parent in the armed services) is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is slightly above average, and the proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- The curriculum is extended through links with: further education colleges; Chichester University; Winchester College; local businesses, including Rolls Royce; and organisations such as the South Downs National Park Authority. The college is part of the Sussex Liaison and Progression Accord.
- About 20 students in Years 10 and 11 attend off-site courses at the organisations listed above.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The college is an Investor in People, and holds an Investor in Careers award. It also holds an International Schools award at intermediate level, and is affiliated to the E-learning Foundation.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Bring about greater consistency in marking, so that students are more aware of what they need to do to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- On entry to the college, students' attainment has been below average for several years, though the attainment of the current Year 7 was above average.
- As a result of excellent teaching, students make outstanding progress, so that by the time they reach Year 11, their attainment is well above what is expected from their starting points. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades in GCSE, including English and mathematics, has risen by 31 percentage points since 2010 and is now at 73 per cent.
- From entry to the college in Year 7 to when they take GCSE at the end of Year 11, almost all students progress at least as well as expected. In mathematics, about half progress more rapidly than expected, and in English about one third.
- The school has a consistent approach to teaching and learning, and across all subjects nearly all teaching is good or better. This is reflected in the quality of learning, and students' attainment is above average across most areas of the curriculum.
- The college makes good use of early entry to GCSE examinations to help students to reach their potential. It responds to success by providing additional curriculum opportunities to prepare students for more advanced work. As a result, the most able students develop their thinking and discussion skills, and students entering the sixth form are well equipped for more advanced study.
- About two in five students known to be eligible for free school meals failed to meet national expectations for progress in English and mathematics from Year 7 to Year 11 in 2011. This number decreased slightly in 2012. An ambitious programme of support to narrow the gap between students eligible for free school meals and other students is now in place. Those students eligible for the pupil premium are rapidly catching up their peers, and the number making nationally expected progress has doubled in the past year.
- The college has worked with the local library service to ensure that books in the learning resource centre appeal to students, and the number of loans has already increased considerably as a result. This has increased their enthusiasm for reading.
- The college is passionate about the need to support all students in line with their needs and, as a result, disabled students and those who have special educational needs progress more quickly than expected and gain good GCSE grades.
- The college makes excellent use of data from feeder primary schools, and outcomes from its own testing, to help students who need extra support in their literacy skills. An additional tutor group in Years 7 and 8 and the deployment of higher level teaching assistants and full-time non-teaching pastoral leaders have all contributed to improved literacy skills and removed barriers to learning.
- Students enter the sixth form with grades that are typical for the start of Year 12. As they do for Year 11 students, the school sets challenging targets for sixth form students' progress, and in the main these are met as a result of the good or better teaching they receive. Many students gain places at university, often in highly sought-after departments.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Students say that they enjoy their lessons, and that teachers place great emphasis on meeting the needs of each individual. Work is varied so that students of all abilities are challenged appropriately, and nearly all lessons have them totally engaged and interested in what they are doing. Skilled questioning plays a part in most lessons, and in the best it is deep, targeted and probing to gauge the depth of students' understanding.
- In a mathematics lesson with a lower-ability set in Year 9, sensitive questioning and excellent individual support led to outstanding progress, with much enjoyment, and the class left the room excited about what they had learned.
- Teachers plan activities that promote the development of creative skills, both in creative subjects such as photography and music, and throughout the curriculum. Students value such opportunities, which contribute very well to their spiritual and cultural development.
- Teachers' exceptionally good subject knowledge contributes greatly to the development of work for the most-able students. Such students are challenged at a high level by perceptive questioning, and by opportunities for creative learning.
- By adopting a highly inclusive approach, in which support for every student is at the heart of the teachers' work, all students become completely absorbed in what they are doing. In a good French lesson, for example, students on a work-related course worked together to sell a house.
- Discussion with students shows that improvements in teaching have driven whole college development over the last few years. Scrutiny of their books confirms this, with students' work in many classrooms showing rapid progress in a relatively short period.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. Professional development resulting from partnerships with other well established sixth forms have improved the quality of teaching in Years 12 and 13, both in GCE and vocational courses. Teachers know their students very well indeed and pride themselves on communicating their enthusiasm for their subject. As a result, the proportion of students reaching A and A* grades continues to increase rapidly.
- In just a few lessons, however, teachers marked students' work conscientiously, but did not give sufficiently clear advice that they could respond to, to help them to improve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' attitudes to learning are exemplary throughout the college. In lessons they demonstrate that they are keen to learn and do their very best. They have consistently very positive relationships with their teachers and with their peers and often work to the limits of their capabilities. These attributes make a strong contribution to their outstanding personal progress.
- Students unreservedly say that the college has improved greatly, and are proud that they have contributed to its high reputation in the community. This is reflected in their excellent conduct around the college, punctuality and kindness to each other.
- Students new to the college and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable are given excellent support to help them settle in quickly, feel safe, and well cared for, so that they make very rapid progress.

- Bullying in any form, including the use of racist or homophobic language, is rare, and tackled vigorously if it does occur. The college's clear code of conduct and pastoral support systems help to create an exceptionally positive climate for learning.
- Attendance has significantly improved over the last three years, and is now above average. In tandem with this, exclusions have fallen, and are now only sparingly used as a sanction. Persistent absence is greatly decreasing.
- Students feel extremely safe in the college and are fully aware of how to react if they find themselves in unsafe situations out of school. In particular, they know all about the importance of e-safety and the dangers of substance misuse, from assemblies, tutor time and enrichment days.
- The behaviour and safety of students who attend alternative provision are meticulously monitored to ensure that they are safe and get the most out of the opportunities offered to them.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Students say that there have been impressive improvements in the college over the last three years. Leaders and managers work together with governors in the pursuit of excellence, modelling the highest professional standards in all that they do.
- The college has a culture of improvement, based on rigorous self-evaluation and improvement plans. A high degree of collaboration between staff, and a culture in which each student is an individual, is at the heart of everything the college does. This highly inclusive approach to its work ensures that all students are supported to give their best and have equal opportunities to succeed. The college does not tolerate discrimination of any kind.
- The Principal and college leaders at all levels work with a high degree of unity of purpose, with the aim of securing consistently outstanding teaching. Teachers new to the profession celebrate the inspirational approach of the Principal, and more experienced teachers praise most highly the professional relations he builds with staff at all levels, and his commitment to their professional development. Students and their parents fully acknowledge the college's success in promoting outstanding learning, which they see as an entitlement.
- The college has excellent procedures for monitoring teaching and for supporting teachers whose work is not yet outstanding. Staff welcome these procedures, and the help that they get. Joint observations in which inspectors and senior staff observed the same lesson confirmed that the college's judgement is accurately aligned with national standards.
- Discussions with staff at all levels show that programmes for the professional development of staff based on identified needs are greatly appreciated. Teachers who are newly qualified or close to the start of their careers especially value this.
- The college's curriculum meets the needs and interests of students throughout the school extremely well, including the sixth form. Learning is well matched to need, so that there is one-to-one support for those who find the work difficult, and the most able are challenged to ensure that they learn to think independently and manage their own learning. Extra-curricular activities include a wide range of sports, and opportunities to participate in cultural activities such as musical performance, dance and artistic activities.

- Students, especially in the sixth form, have many opportunities to take responsibility, often work with younger students, and are exceptionally well prepared for life in modern democratic Britain.
- Statutory requirements in relation to appointment of staff and safeguarding of children are met.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The local governing body brings to the college an impressive range of professional expertise and skills gained in industry, in the public sector, and in other high-performing colleges. Governors are ambitious for the college, provide challenge and hold the Principal to account for improvements in everything the college does, and especially in teaching. They have a very good understanding of the quality of teaching and students' achievement. Governors oversee excellent procedures for the management of the performance of all staff, including the Principal, and play an important part in making sure that pay reflects how well each member of staff performs. They know what the college is doing to tackle any underperformance. The governors work with the Principal to make sure that partnerships are promoted, and work for the benefit of the students in the college. These include links with universities, and with major local companies and schools. The college works closely with outside agencies to promote the well-being of its students and their families. Links with parents are actively promoted and contribute significantly to the work of the college. There is astute and rigorous financial management. The allocation of the pupil premium is well thought out, and conspicuously successful in supporting the enhanced progress of eligible students.

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	135760
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	406626

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	744
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	59
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Anderson
Principal	Joe Vitagliano
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2011
Telephone number	01730 812451
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