

# Garth Hill College

Bull Lane, Bracknell, Berkshire RG42 2AD

#### Inspection dates

21-22 February 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

# Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

#### This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' experiences of school vary too much. While some pupils in Years 7 to 11 experience an effective education, others do not.
- Some leaders do not have an accurate enough view of the strengths and weaknesses. Not all leaders ensure there are consistent standards in the areas for which they are responsible.
- Approaches to assessment, target setting, and the tracking of pupils' progress are confused and ineffective, especially in key stage 3.
- Leaders do not have a sufficiently developed or accurate view of the impact of the curriculum on pupils' progress and overall experience of school.

#### The school has the following strengths

- The 16 to 19 study programmes are ably led. Students generally achieve well and are supported effectively.
- In some subjects, teaching is effective; notably in history, citizenship and some technology subjects. Pupils' progress in GCSE mathematics is above average.
- Pupils in the two additional resource bases are well supported and make strong progress.

- Pupils' learning is too variable. Some pupils are not set work that builds on their previous learning and achievement. Pupils' learning in science has, until recently, been negatively affected by staff turbulence.
- Disadvantaged pupils made less progress than others nationally with similar starting points in 2015 and 2016 GCSE examinations. The progress of some disadvantaged pupils currently in school is not consistent across classes, years and subjects.
- A number of pupils' learning is disrupted by their peers. Some pupils expressed concerns that bullying was not always dealt with well enough. Attendance for disadvantaged pupils has improved in some year groups but remains too low in others.
- New strategies to develop pupils' literacy and improve teachers' practice are well focused.
- Performance management arrangements are overseen effectively by governors who know the school well.
- A number of parents were highly positive about the school and praised the individualised support it provides, as well as the principal's approachability.



# Full report

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

- Improve pupils' daily experiences of school by ensuring that leaders and governors:
  - evaluate strengths and weaknesses more accurately, and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the discrepancies between different pupils' experiences
  - ensure that senior leaders are consistently rigorous in the way they hold staff they manage to account
  - review the impact of middle leaders and check that they all set high enough standards when monitoring the quality of teaching and learning
  - review and develop the school's approach to assessment, including the methods teachers use to assess pupils' learning, the tracking of pupils' progress and the targets pupils are set
  - make sure that the planned curriculum review is sufficiently focused on the impact of the curriculum on pupils' outcomes and their experiences of learning, especially disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve pupils' outcomes, especially for disadvantaged pupils, by:
  - ensuring that pupils who have potential to achieve highly are identified and given opportunities to fulfil their potential
  - stipulating that the planned review of pupil premium funding includes an analysis of the impact of the curriculum, timetable and groupings for disadvantaged pupils
  - making sure that teachers set work that is challenging enough, especially in key stage 3
  - developing teachers' understanding of pupils' prior knowledge, skills, and understanding, including age-related expectations in Year 6, so that they can build on them more fully
  - further embedding work to improve pupils' literacy, specifically their ability to articulate their thoughts and ideas in writing in a range of contexts.
- Improve pupils' behaviour, especially reducing low-level disruption in lessons, by:
  - unfalteringly pursuing greater consistency in the way behaviour is managed, so all pupils have equally positive experiences of learning
  - adopting a more consistent approach to bullying, so all incidents of bullying are dealt with equally well.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium is recommended.

### **Inspection judgements**

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management

- Pupils' experiences of learning are polarised. While some pupils flourish, others languish. Some senior leaders are not sufficiently aware of the disparity between pupils' experiences, especially between disadvantaged pupils and others. High levels of variability result from a range of factors. Some, but by no means all, are beyond leaders' control, such as difficulties in recruiting teachers. A significant factor is the difference in expectations within and between some of the six 'schools' (subject faculties/areas) in the college.
- Some pupils and parents expressed concerns about the quality of teaching, pupils' behaviour, and the overall culture of the school, including a lack of consistency in how well leaders tackle bullying. While some middle and senior leaders respond well to these concerns, others do not take enough heed of them.
- Senior leaders and governors have not evaluated the impact of middle leaders on pupils' daily learning and outcomes with enough stringency. As a consequence, some middle leaders are not as effective as others.
- Senior leaders do not always hold heads of school to account rigorously enough for the quality of teaching and outcomes in some year groups. In turn, some heads of school do not monitor and evaluate pupils' progress thoroughly enough.
- Leaders have not developed effective assessment approaches and as a result, some pupils' progress is too slow. In particular, there is an unhelpful incompatibility between the key stage 3 curriculum and the way it is assessed. As a consequence, pupils' progress through the curriculum is not always as strong as leaders think it is. In addition, some Year 7 pupils are not assessed accurately enough when they join the school. They are set targets that are too low, leading to some teachers underestimating what they can achieve.
- The leadership of the curriculum is not sufficiently effective and leaders are rightly planning a wholesale curriculum review. Leaders have not evaluated the impact of the timetable and the implementation of the curriculum on pupils' learning and outcomes.
- The rationale behind the courses pupils take at key stage 4 is not always clear. For example, some pupils in Year 11 have recently been allocated to take the European Computer Driving Licence qualification, which is not appropriate for all of them.
- Funding for disadvantaged pupils has not led to improved outcomes for this group, despite the school having detailed plans for how it should be spent this academic year. One reason is because leaders have not sufficiently investigated the impact of grouping on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The vast majority of disadvantaged pupils are in lower sets, where teaching is weaker.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is well targeted and close collaboration between heads of subject and teachers delivering additional support is helping pupils make progress.
- The leadership of pupils who have special educational need and/or disabilities has a stronger impact in the additional resource base and learning support centre than across the school. In particular, pupils make strong progress in the 'Rise@GHC' base, which caters for those on the autistic spectrum. Pupils in this base are stimulated by well-



#### **Requires improvement**



planned learning activities and taught how best to apply specific learning skills when completing tasks.

- The impact of funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and /or disabilities across the school is not strong enough. Approaches used to track the small steps in progress made by pupils who receive additional support across the school are not sufficiently well developed and this limits the impact of the funding.
- The representative from the local authority, who supports the school, is new in post. Her support is well focused because it is based on a perceptive and rigorous evaluation of the school. However, as it is in its infancy, it has not yet made a positive difference to pupils' learning and outcomes.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported effectively in some subjects, such as citizenship and through the well-planned pupil leadership programme, which is currently being piloted. However, despite British values being focused upon in assemblies and taught in a range of lessons, some pupils do not uphold these values fully. For instance, pupils do not always show tolerance towards each other.
- A number of parents praised the school highly for the support it provides for their youngsters, including the receptiveness of the principal and his high visibility.

#### Governance of the school

Some aspects of governance are strong and effective. For example, the process of managing teachers' performance is especially robust. Governors make good use of their detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses in the decisions they make about pay rewards. Minutes of governors' meetings show that they have challenged the school's leaders to account for recent years' GCSE results, stipulating that results need to improve, especially for disadvantaged pupils. On occasion, governors have accepted leaders' responses to their questions too readily. For example, governors rightly questioned leaders about the effectiveness of key stage 3 assessment but they did not probe leaders' explanations rigorously enough. The new chair of the governing body has a sharp and clear understanding of how the school needs to develop further, wisely progressing plans for a review of governance and gathering pupils' views on the school.

#### Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The leader responsible for safeguarding vigilantly monitors procedures and processes. Record-keeping and other aspects of the school's safeguarding work have been reviewed, including by governors. Following this, amendments have been made and best practice adopted. The designated leader carefully scrutinises the concerns staff have about pupils, making good use of training and external partnerships, including those for preventing radicalisation. Where necessary, referrals are made to the local authority's welfare services and information-sharing agreements mean the follow-up support the school provides is strong and well-focused.
- Pupils engage well with the detailed guidance provided on how to counter risks. They are taught about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and how to stay safe online, in a



range of lessons. Pupils are also given helpful guidance from outside speakers, who contribute to citizenship and personal development lessons, including the police.

Safeguarding and pastoral leaders know that some pupils feel intimidated and bullied by their peers, including through social media. Recently, leaders have sensibly involved pupils in tackling these issues by establishing a bullying council.

#### Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

#### **Requires improvement**

- Teaching is too variable to be good. While there are pockets of effective practice in mathematics, history, some technology subjects and in citizenship, strong practice is not consistent across different classes, year groups, and subjects. In a number of lower-ability classes, where there is typically a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils, teaching is weaker, leading to slower progress for this group.
- A high staff turnover and lessons covered by internal and external cover teachers have led to inconsistencies in teaching and the way behaviour is managed. Leaders acknowledge that science has undergone a high degree of turbulence and have rightly focused their efforts on this area.
- Within some subjects, there are inconsistencies in how well teachers assess pupils' learning. For example, in English some pupils' work in key stage 3 indicated that assessment was based on scant evidence, such as a paragraph of writing, while others suggested that assessment was based on a wider body of evidence.
- Teaching and learning in key stage 3 is not always challenging enough. Some pupils told inspectors that they were repeating the same work as they had done at primary school. Teachers do not always take enough account of pupils' prior learning, especially their ability to digest information, evaluate, and compare. Teachers sometimes accept work which is of a lower standard than is required to meet age-related expectations in Year 6.
- Homework does not always support pupils' learning because there is a lack of clarity about the process of setting and completing homework. The confusion is in part due to revoking changes that leaders made last year to how homework was set. However, some teachers are not clear enough about the role homework plays in developing pupils' learning.
- Recent developments in English have led to improvements in key stage 4. The new head of subject is rapidly implementing necessary changes, prioritising key stage 4 but astutely recognising the need to strengthen key stage 3. There is now clarity and rigour in the way Year 11 pupils are prepared for the additional challenges of GCSEs. However, some less-able Year 11 pupils need to make rapid progress to catch up because teachers' expectations of them over time have been too low.
- In science, especially in key stage 4, teaching is gradually improving. A departmentwide focus on using questioning to check pupils' understanding is leading to greater consistency. Some agreed new approaches are not yet fully implemented across all classes. As a general rule, key stage 4 teaching is stronger than it is at key stage 3.
- Leaders have introduced well-focused, whole-school approaches to planning learning and improving pupils' opportunities to write. These approaches are beginning to have a positive impact in some subjects, such as English, technology and history. More work is



needed to ensure the approaches are employed equally well across subjects and year groups. They are underdeveloped in some humanities classes, for example in geography and religious studies.

- Where teaching is more effective, teachers' feedback enables pupils to extend their knowledge, evaluate their skills, and develop a greater understanding of how to approach examination questions.
- Mathematics teaching is generally strong because learning in this area is rigorously evaluated. Of note is the way that pupils adopt the role of experts and researchers within the class to support others and strengthen their own understanding. Broadly speaking, pupils effectively hone and develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills, although occasionally pupils could be challenged even more.
- In history, pupils are well taught, successfully developing and applying the skills of historians. For example, in one class pupils were using their analytical skills to prioritise which factors were most significant in the demise of Anne Boleyn. It is noteworthy that teachers assess pupils' learning using a bespoke approach, which is closely linked to GCSE assessment criteria. This is a having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Pupils in citizenship lessons access a variety of well-planned learning opportunities, including visits from expert speakers. Debates on topics like human rights and the media support pupils in learning about fundamental British values.

#### Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement** 

#### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. While some pupils are well-focused on their learning and try hard, others do not. In a number of lessons, pupils lose concentration when they are expected to work independently. Teachers do not always challenge pupils when their attention wanders or they stop working.
- Some pupils do not display enough pride in their work. For instance, they write in felttip pen in their books. Not all teachers insist on high enough standards of presentation.
- A number of pupils have found the turbulence in staffing demoralising and this has contributed to their poor attitudes to learning. However, where teaching is stronger and more consistent, pupils' attitudes to learning are more positive. For example, pupils respond well and are keen to learn in history.
- The school has worked hard to improve pupils' attitudes through developing their leadership skills. Pupils have the chance to hear external expert speakers, who are positive role models, as part of the well-planned citizenship programme. Although this is making a difference to some pupils, it is not having a sufficiently deep impact on the pupils' outlook and the overall culture.
- Information about careers in key stage 4 effectively guides pupils in deciding upon their next steps. Support is well-planned and includes an online guidance package along with effective trial business interviews. Careers guidance provided in the lower school is not comprehensive enough, and does not support pupils well enough in



making informed choices about their GCSE options.

#### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because it is too variable. While it is positive in some classes, in other classes pupils prevent their classmates from learning. Pupils' disruptive behaviour is often due to weaker teaching and staffing turbulence.
- Pupils' and parents' views about behaviour vary greatly. A number expressed concern about the impact of disruptive behaviour on learning. One parent commented, 'My child often feels it is difficult to concentrate with disruptive behaviour in the classroom.' However, a number of parents were positive about the way the school managed behaviour and the care provided for pupils.
- Senior leaders are not making enough use of the information they have on pupils' conduct to tackle inconsistencies in the way middle leaders and teachers manage pupils' behaviour. They do not analyse the incidents of disruptive behaviour in sufficient depth, so as to identify trends and patterns. Some leaders, who are new to the post, need greater support in this aspect of their role.
- Pupils' experiences of bullying are mixed. While some pupils said there was little bullying, and any occasional incidents of bullying were dealt with well, others expressed concerns about the use of derogatory language and some targeted bullying of Year 7 pupils. Several leaders are aware of the problem and are tackling it well. For example, they have introduced a bullying council to ensure that pupils have a voice in how bullying is tackled. However, not all leaders deal with bullying equally well.
- New pastoral assistants have been sensibly introduced to improve the attendance and behaviour of groups of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils. The focus on improving the attendance has led to some improvements, especially in Years 7 to 10. However, there is still too much discrepancy between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and others in Year 11.
- The behaviour and attendance of pupils placed in alternative provision is closely monitored by both school and alternative provision staff, who work effectively in partnership. Pupils accessing alternative provision benefit from bespoke programmes, which meet their needs well and assist them in managing their own behaviour.

#### **Outcomes for pupils**

#### **Requires improvement**

- Following some disappointing GCSE results in summer 2015, the school has sensibly focused on improving outcomes, especially for disadvantaged pupils. However, its success was limited: in 2016 pupils' progress was broadly average, but disadvantaged pupils' progress was slower. Of note was the slow progress of middle-ability, disadvantaged pupils in English GCSE examinations.
- Work in pupils' books and standards reached in lessons indicate that across a range of subjects in both key stages, disadvantaged pupils' progress is too variable. Although, in subjects where teaching is better, for example in history, disadvantaged pupils make stronger progress. Nevertheless, overall, disadvantaged pupils' progress, including the most able disadvantaged, is not strong enough.



- Teaching in key stage 3 does not always provide pupils with enough challenge. For example, in modern foreign languages some pupils are not given tasks that will enable them to make the strong progress required for success at GCSE. In addition, most-able pupils are not always provided with the depth of knowledge, skills, and understanding required to meet their GCSE targets in the more demanding qualifications.
- Pupils' progress in science and English, in key stage 4, is improving from last academic year when it was too slow. A high staff turnover in science has had a negative impact on pupils' progress, which was below average for all ability groups. However, the new head of school and science curriculum leader are beginning to secure better results and in most key stage 4 classes progress is improving. Similarly, the new head of subject's relentless focus on developing key GCSE examination skills means that progress in English is improving.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is strong and improving due to consistent and effective teaching. In 2016, pupils made better progress in mathematics than they did in English, or in science.
- Pupils attending alternative provision make lower than average progress in their academic courses. On some vocational courses, which have been carefully chosen to maximise pupils' engagement with learning, pupils' progress is stronger. However, not all the courses pupils take are counted in the government's progress calculations.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made significantly less progress than others nationally in 2016 examinations. In some cases, this was because they took qualifications that, while meeting their needs, did not count in the government's progress measures. Support for this group is now targeted more effectively and their progress is set to improve in the 2017 examinations. However, in some key stage 3 classes, pupils with additional needs are not provided with work that is challenging enough.
- Pupils with additional language and communication needs are catered for effectively in the 'Rise@GHC' centre. The school's own tracking shows that pupils' progress over time at the centre is strong, although when pupils first join in Year 7 their progress takes some time to 'take off'. The responsible leader is sensibly developing a more detailed approach to tracking pupils with additional needs both within the additional resource base and within the main school.
- Effective support and guidance meant that the vast majority of pupils in 2015 progressed on to education, training or employment after Year 11. The school's own figures for 2016 are equally as positive.

#### 16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The head of school for the sixth form runs a tight ship and, consequently, learning and outcomes are better in the sixth form than in other parts of the school.
- Sixth-form leaders are particularly effective at holding curriculum leaders and teachers to account for the progress students are making. Of note is the way in which leaders use a range of information to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, including lesson observations and updates on students' progress. Much teaching is consequently strong, with opportunities for pupils to formulate their own opinions, apply theories and



develop a repertoire of higher-level skills.

- Over the past two years, there have been steady improvements in students' outcomes, in both academic and vocational qualifications. For example, the percentage of pupils achieving A\*/A grades at A level has improved since 2015. In addition, the average score per student has improved since 2015. Current, reliable predictions indicate that the improving trend will continue.
- Retention rates are improving due the expanding range of qualifications provided, especially one-year vocational qualifications. Leaders have been responsive to individual students' needs, providing bespoke study programmes which effectively combine academic and vocational learning, including links with local businesses, and mini-internships. Opportunities for students to progress from level 2 to level 3 courses are improving as new level 3 courses are introduced.
- Leaders have righty focused on the development of students' English and mathematical skills. Level 2 learning in these areas is effective, because it is tightly monitored and teachers work closely to ensure that students clearly understand what they need to do, or to develop their own learning further.
- Study programmes have evolved, following leaders' sharp evaluations and feedback from students. They include individual meetings with tutors and a 'bridging' programme to support transition from Year 11 into Year 12 and, where appropriate, from Year 12 into Year 13. The 'bridging' programme is sensibly focused on improving resilience and attitudes to learning.
- Students benefit from an array of additional opportunities, including the chance to develop leadership and mentoring skills through working with younger pupils in the college. All students have the opportunity to undertake work experience to develop their work skills further. Consequently, they are successful in their next steps, moving on to a range of destinations, including higher education, employment and further training. The proportion moving on to higher education courses is increasing steadily.
- Students behave well and make a positive contribution to school life, with a head girl and head boy providing positive role models for younger pupils. Students' attendance has been too low and leaders have rightly focused on improving this aspect of the sixth form. Following rigorous evaluation, initial approaches were shelved as they were not working well enough. A brand new, more robust set of strategies to improve attendance was introduced very recently. It is too early for these new initiatives to have had impact.



# **School details**

Unique reference number	110069
Local authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	10024824

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,643
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	230
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Mrs Liz Dolby
Principal	Mr Keith Grainger
Telephone number	01344 421122
Website	www.garthhillcollege.com
Email address	reception@garthhillcollege.com
Date of previous inspection	21–22 May 2013

#### Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Garth Hill College is much larger than the average-sized secondary school, with a sixth form.
- Last academic year, the school experienced high levels of staff turnover. Typically between 15% and 20% of staff were new at the start of this academic year.
- A new chair of the governing body took up the role on 1 February 2017.



- The college has six schools within it, each led by a head of school: school of languages and communications; school of mathematics and information studies; school of science and technology; school of human, creative and physical studies; sixth form; and school of supported learning.
- Pupils are split into four houses: Lawrence House, Fielden House, Brownlow House, and Haversham House.
- A small number of pupils in key stage 4 attend alternative provision at College Hall in Bracknell.
- Four fifths of students are white British. The proportion of students from other ethnic groups is below average, as is the proportion speaking English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium funding is below average.
- The school has an additional resource base, known as 'Rise@GHC', which currently caters for 16 pupils who have additional speech, language and communication needs. In addition, the school has a learning support centre to assist pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and other pupils who are need support with their studies.
- The proportion of pupils supported because they have special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly above average as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plan.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.



## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was initially a section 8 inspection led by an Ofsted Inspector. On being deemed section 5, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors took over leading the inspection.
- Inspectors gathered evidence from 60 short visits made to lessons on several separate occasions. In some instances, inspectors were accompanied by the subject leader, and sometimes by the head of school. On other occasions they were accompanied by senior leaders. Inspectors also made longer visits to 29 lessons and attended an assembly. Visits were made to a number of lessons in the sixth form, including in vocational subjects. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons, around the school and during breaktimes.
- Inspectors met separately with the principal on several occasions and with each vice principal. Meetings were held separately with heads of school, sixth-form leaders, a group of subject leaders, a group of house leaders, leaders responsible for careers guidance and safeguarding leaders. Meetings were also held with governors, including the chair of the governing body, and separately with a representative for the local authority. Two scrutinies of pupils' work were undertaken.
- Inspectors met with seven different groups of pupils and a group of parents. A telephone call was held with leaders from the alternative provision used by the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised 66 responses to the staff questionnaire, and 250 responses on Parent View. In addition, inspectors scrutinised 225 comments made via free text.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents, including the school's strategic planning documents, minutes of meetings including governor discussions, reports of attendance and behaviour, records of checks made on staff when they are appointed and records relating to pupils' safety and academic progress.

#### **Inspection team**

Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Carlyle	Ofsted Inspector
Anne Cullum	Ofsted Inspector
Alistair Brien	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Robb-Webb	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Powell	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Tustian	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Roessler	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Cartwright, lead inspector section 8	Ofsted Inspector



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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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