

Garth Hill College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110069
Local Authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	288580
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2007
Reporting inspector	William Geoffrey Robson

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1199
6th form	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr John Baildam
Principal	Mr Stan Turner
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2001
School address	Sandy Lane Bracknell RG12 2JH
Telephone number	01344 421122
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Garth Hill is a larger than average secondary school with a relatively small sixth form. It is a specialist technology college. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with about one in ten from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. Thirty pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities is close to the national average. There are five looked after children.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Garth Hill is an improving college which provides a satisfactory education for its pupils and students. Strong leadership from the principal has established a group of senior staff who work well together as a dedicated team. Teachers have worked hard and successfully to improve pupils' standards, behaviour and attitudes since the last inspection. Parents have recognised the improvements, with the result that the college regularly has many more applications for places than it can provide. The leadership team is realistic in its self-evaluation and recognises that there is still much to do. In light of the college's past track record, there is good capacity for further improvement.

Attainment on entry to the college has remained broadly average but the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades at A*-C has increased year by year. Standards have risen from well below average; they are now close to the national average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. However, in 2006, Year 11 pupils made inadequate progress in English, mathematics and design and technology. Difficulty in recruiting and retaining specialist staff led to a lack of continuity and inconsistent teaching. Recruitment in these subjects has been better recently and the quality of teaching has improved as a result. Pupils are now making satisfactory progress but standards in Year 11 are still below those in several other subjects. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory but inconsistent. There is some outstanding teaching where teachers challenge and engage pupils fully, but some lessons lack pace. Some temporary teachers lack the specialist knowledge they need to teach older pupils and have difficulty managing challenging pupils. Other teachers plan well and establish good relationships with pupils.

In Years 7, 8 and 9 pupils respond well to the opportunity to help teachers organise and manage classes. They willingly take responsibility as 'pupil managers'. As a result, behaviour has clearly improved since the last inspection. However, many parents remain concerned that a significant minority of pupils, especially in Years 10 and 11, can be challenging and disruptive, mainly in lessons taken by temporary staff. They do not respond as well as younger pupils to the opportunities that the college offers to take responsibility. Older pupils say, 'We don't all take the pupil manager idea seriously and neither do the teachers.' A few younger pupils worry about pockets of intimidating and boisterous behaviour by their older peers. Nevertheless, most feel safe and are confident that any bullying or racist comments will be dealt with swiftly and decisively. Overall, pupils enjoy their education, as shown by their improving attendance, which is now in line with the national average. Most develop healthy lifestyles but some continue to smoke openly when leaving the school grounds. A satisfactory curriculum contributes to pupils' development of skills needed for life after school and nearly all pupils move on to further education, training or employment when they leave the college. Staff provide good care, guidance and support for pupils. They identify and provide well for those in need of extra support and make very good use of close links with outside agencies when necessary.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards in the sixth form are satisfactory. Students enter courses with below average prior attainment. Most leave with results that are also slightly below average, but their progress is satisfactory. In 2006 a significant number of AS students failed to gain a pass grade; their progress in Year 12 was inadequate. Current Year 12 students are doing better

and making satisfactory progress. Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. They feel safe in the college, but comment that there are too few opportunities for them to be involved in the way it is run. There is limited scope for them to develop responsibility and students feel that they do not have a strong enough voice in important aspects of college life.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The teaching is good in some lessons but, too frequently, there is insufficient pace and challenge. The sixth form curriculum is inadequate. There is an appropriate range of subjects, but the curriculum is not well organised. Some students experience timetable clashes and are unable to attend all of their lessons. This is partly caused by the current lack of an agreed common timetable between local colleges and schools. The range of enrichment activities is limited. There are too few opportunities for students to take responsibility. For example, opportunities for work experience or community based service are poorly coordinated, so that some students are unable to participate in these activities. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The students know their current and predicted grades and they find this information helpful in improving their work. However, they feel they are not always adequately supported or mentored to meet their targets. They receive suitable guidance about their career options and the college is rightly proud that the number of students progressing to higher education is rising year-on-year. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college's self-evaluation has identified the issues restricting achievement and the development plan identifies suitable strategies for improvement. The sixth form provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and design and technology, especially at GCSE.
- Improve the consistency of teaching and investigate ways of recruiting more permanent teachers.
- Develop the curriculum in the sixth form to offer students a wider range of choices and opportunities.
- Improve the attitudes of pupils in Years 10 and 11 by consistently providing relevant opportunities for them to take responsibility.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils enter the college with broadly average levels of attainment. Results in National Curriculum tests and at GCSE have risen consistently in recent years, from well below average a few years ago. Standards are now slightly above average in Year 9 and close to average in Year 11. However, in 2006, although overall GCSE results were close to the national average, they were below average in English, mathematics and design and technology. The college met some of its targets for specialist status but not in all specialist subjects. Progress for this year group was therefore inadequate, partly because of a lack of adequate staffing and frequent changes of teacher for many classes. This situation has subsequently improved and pupils' achievement is now satisfactory. Pupils are working successfully towards challenging targets, especially

during Key Stage 3. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive good support and make satisfactory progress. Standards in the sixth form are close to the national average and students' achievement is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being is satisfactory with some good aspects. Most pupils get on well with each other and their teachers. Younger pupils have more positive attitudes and respond very well to incentives for good behaviour. Older pupils are less willing to take responsibility. Some behave badly when they are taught by temporary staff. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory. Thought-provoking assemblies and the programme of the religious education department have a significant influence on pupils' spiritual and moral views and social awareness. However, pupils have insufficient understanding of cultures and traditions other than their own. They appreciate that their views are taken seriously and are involved in decision-making through the year and college councils. For example, they helped to choose a new summer uniform. In contrast, sixth form students feel they have insufficient say about the way the college is run. Pupils contribute well to the local community by supporting anti-bullying campaigns in primary schools. Many pupils develop healthy lifestyles and choose healthy options in the canteen. The college runs anti-smoking courses but parents and staff remain concerned about students who smoke openly when they come out of college at the end of the day.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The senior management team monitors the quality of teaching and learning closely and has an accurate understanding of teachers' strengths and weaknesses. Good procedures are in place to support permanent teachers. However, frequent changes of staff and the large number of temporary teachers lead to inconsistency in the quality of teaching. In particular, some temporary teachers lack the specialist subject knowledge needed to teach older pupils effectively. Others find it difficult to manage more challenging pupils.

The lessons observed clearly demonstrate that teachers' planning is good. They set clear objectives and ensure pupils and students are aware of what they need to do in order to succeed. Many tasks are challenging and engage the pupils fully, as seen in two outstanding lessons in art and physical education. However, these strengths are not seen throughout the college and some lessons, although satisfactory, lack this level of challenge and engagement. Some pupils' work is marked well with clear guidance given on what is needed to improve but again this is inconsistent. The more confident teachers allow pupils to demonstrate their understanding with effective classroom discussions and questioning. Most permanently employed teachers have good classroom management skills and share good relationships with their pupils, especially in the sixth form. When used, these successful strategies enable pupils to make good progress in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The school offers a satisfactory curriculum with some good features. It provides an adequate framework for pupils to make satisfactory progress. There is appropriate breadth and balance across Years 7, 8 and 9. In Years 10 and 11, vocational courses have been introduced alongside the traditional GCSE options. These add further breadth and choice although, where such courses do not lead to GCSE accreditation, the school has not properly identified a set of success criteria so that the effectiveness of the courses can be gauged. Adequate provision is made for personal, social and health education and, in Years 10 and 11, pupils follow short GCSE courses in citizenship and religious education. However, the quality and effectiveness of tutor time to support pupils' personal development is inconsistent, especially in Years 10 and 11. Extra curricular provision is quite extensive, with pupils able to participate in a range of activities including sports, drama productions and revision clubs, though some of the take up rates are not high. The school's specialist technology status has led to some good enhancements to the curriculum. A vocational science course is now offered at GCSE, as is an industrial technology course. Both have been successful in helping to raise standards. Technology status has also enabled the school to extend its primary and community liaison work. A programme of careers guidance, work experience and enterprise learning, supported by links with local business, helps equip pupils adequately for their future economic well-being. However, some leave college with low levels of numeracy and literacy skills. Timetable clashes and limited opportunities for enrichment result in an inadequate curriculum for sixth form students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The college is fully committed to the care of all pupils. The child protection officer is a member of the senior management team and is actively involved in several local authority initiatives associated with the care of pupils. As a result, the college uses a wide range of agencies effectively to assist in this care. All staff are fully trained in child protection procedures. All, including supply staff from agencies, have been checked following the published guidelines and detailed records kept. There are regular health and safety audits and risk assessments are performed when required. The college also has effective systems to support the progress and personal development of looked after children and those at risk of exclusion. The behaviour support unit has enabled the college to reduce the number of excluded pupils significantly. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well known by teachers and they receive good support. The number of pupils with English as an additional language is relatively low. They settle into college quickly and receive suitable support from the college and local authority. Pupils receive good advice from the careers advice agencies, including individual interviews.

Good academic support and guidance is an important and effective element in raising standards. Pupils and parents are informed on a regular basis regarding current attainment and future target levels or grades. Any underachievement that is identified is quickly challenged and further support is then given to pupils in booster classes or other targeted groups. Pupils appreciate this extra help and feel it is helping them to reach their targets. However, in the

sixth form, students would like more support of this nature. The data is also used well by senior managers to review pupils' progress in and across subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The principal's strong leadership has led to good improvement since the last inspection. He has successfully established a senior team with a clear sense of common purpose. In recent years the college's reputation in the community has improved and it is now considerably over-subscribed. Pupils attain higher standards and behaviour in lessons is much better. This partly results from a common system of behaviour management that encourages pupils to take more responsibility for their own behaviour and learning. However although the system began as long ago as 2002, it is better established with pupils in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11.

Middle managers do a good job generally and are usually supported and challenged effectively by senior leaders. Teaching by permanent staff is regularly and accurately monitored with appropriate follow-up. Staff and governors have found it difficult to solve the problem of recruitment and retention of teachers. A substantial turnover of staff has had a negative effect on pupils' achievement, especially in design and technology, English and mathematics. The problem has lessened this year but still persists. Governors provide satisfactory support. Their expertise and commitment are high. They have a good level of involvement in planning developments. They are aware of the positive achievements of the college and are now challenging weaker aspects, but the results of their actions are yet to be seen.

Senior managers are improving in self-evaluation. For example they recognise that efforts to improve Key Stage 3 have until recently been emphasized at the expense of Key Stage 4. The impact of specialist status as a technology college has also been limited by staffing difficulties but has got back on track and is beginning to have more effect. The budget is adequately managed but has not always been focused on clear priorities in the development plan. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ 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	3	

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	3	
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

23 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Garth Hill College, Bracknell, RG12 2JH

The inspection team really enjoyed visiting your school recently and we would like to thank you for your warm welcome. You expressed your views very well. We were particularly impressed with the way many of you are keen to take responsibility and help your teachers. Our main finding is that the college provides you with a satisfactory quality of education. The college is also improving and, with your help, it can become even better.

The best things about the college are that:

- staff work hard and successfully to improve the college; pupils' standards of work and behaviour have improved since the last inspection
- many of you help your teachers very well, for example by acting as pupil managers in the classroom
- staff provide you with good support and guidance and are concerned about your welfare.

To improve your college further we have asked staff to do four things:

- raise standards in English, mathematics and design and technology, at GCSE level
- improve the consistency of teaching and investigate ways of recruiting more permanent teachers
- develop the curriculum in the sixth form so that students have a wider range of choices and opportunities
- provide opportunities for those of you in Years 10 and 11 to take more responsibility in lessons and in the college.

Of course, a lot of these improvements – and especially the last one – will only work if you yourselves are prepared to take responsibility. Many of you already do and we hope that you will be joined by others in the future.

Thank you again for your help during the inspection and very best wishes for the future.

Bill Robson Lead inspector