

Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114606
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	289990
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham HMI

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	1552
6th form	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jennifer Barnard - Langston
Headteacher	Neil Hunter
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2002
School address	Nevill Avenue Hove BN3 7BW
Telephone number	01273 736244
Fax number	01273 739615

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This is a larger than average, oversubscribed school and sixth form college. Most students are of White British heritage and come from districts of varying levels of affluence and deprivation across Brighton and Hove. Standards on entry to Year 7 are, on average, a little above those expected for students of that age. The percentage not having English as their first language is lower than the national average. The school has specialist status in three areas: performing arts, mathematics and computing and, most recently, vocational education. It is the lead institution in a Leading Edge Partnership. In 2006 the school was awarded the Sportsmark and Artsmark Gold. In 2007 it received the Committed to Careers standard.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school overall, satisfactory in the sixth form, with significant strengths. Amongst these is the school's ethos, an active belief that all students can be guided down appropriate pathways to future economic well-being. Students from Years 7 and 8 described their school as 'friendly, bubbly, with lots to do; you feel you are a part of something'. Many extend their learning and personal development beyond the classroom and the conventional school day. At 6.00 pm on 'band nights', for example, music rooms and the recording studio are alive with aspiring musicians. In tune with this is the exemplary way in which equality of opportunity is promoted. All achievement is valued; vocational options really are awarded the same respect and commitment as traditional, academic subjects. Those with learning difficulties or disabilities are cheerfully supported and arrangements are in place to ensure they play a full part in the life of the school. A parental response gives the flavour of this inclusive approach: 'Our son has learned a dramatic amount and has developed significantly as a person due to the combination of the outstanding support from teachers and carers and the opportunity he has been given to develop in and with peers'. Students' personal development and well-being are good, supported by good care, guidance and support. Attendance rates have been improving since the last inspection and the number of exclusions has dropped in response to well-targeted, early intervention. Students feel safe, confident that problems will be dealt with promptly and effectively. They respect the school's safety procedures and manage to be both lively and sensible as they move around the school's spread-out campus. They understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and generally make healthy choices.

Overall, standards are above average and students' achievement is good; both are satisfactory in the sixth form. Students join Year 7 with slightly above average levels of attainment and by the end of Year 9 are attaining English and mathematics results significantly better than average. Science for Years 7 to 9 has been less strong but there is evidence of improvement. Progress is good in Years 10 and 11. In 2006, 66% gained five or more A*–C GCSE grades, 57% when English and mathematics are taken into account. Both results are significantly better than national averages. Although data show progress and attainment in the sixth form as just above average, the A-level results in 2006 indicate good progress in some subjects, for example in art and design, drama, psychology and biology.

Teaching and learning are good overall, and satisfactory in the sixth form. The rapport between teachers and students is positive and productive. Students respond enthusiastically when teaching has the pace and variety to engage them and meet their varying learning styles. Even when teaching lacks flair, most are amiably cooperative although some younger students become restless and some older ones become passive. Examples of good practice were observed but there were also examples of teaching which lacked the range of method and approach needed to ensure that all students fulfil their potential. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used confidently in most lessons and creatively in some. The curriculum is good overall and is being continually reviewed and developed to support teaching and learning, for example through the extension of vocational options. In the sixth form the curriculum is currently satisfactory and still evolving, with a substantial investment in innovation and enhancement. It is too early to judge the impact of this.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher works closely with a very strong senior team. Priorities for school development are agreed through robust discussion, regularly reviewed and cascaded through a network of delegated responsibilities. Most middle managers respond

well; for a few, ensuring best practice in teaching and learning remains a challenge. The senior team knows its school exceptionally well; its evaluations of strengths and areas for development are convincingly supported by rigorous analysis of up-to-date data, and, where appropriate, by external assessments. This standard of monitoring is not consistently matched by middle managers. With outstandingly well-informed and active support from the governing body, the school's leadership has focused on enhancing teaching and learning and extending the curriculum to meet disparate needs and aspirations. The decision to invest seriously in vocational education, endorsed by the school's recently acquired specialist status, has had a perceptible impact on the motivation and progress of students not at ease in a traditionally academic context. The school offers excellent value for money and its capacity for improvement is good. Despite the feeling expressed by a few parents that school–home communication is not always prompt or full enough, the overwhelming majority of responses indicated that parents are happy with this oversubscribed school: 'When our son was accepted at Blatchington Mill School, he landed on the right planet'.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Provision and outcomes in the sixth form are satisfactory on the whole and good in some important respects. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, showing a clear grasp of strengths and weaknesses and considerable initiative in seeking solutions. There are substantial challenges from educational developments locally which affect recruitment. Achievement is satisfactory overall and standards are average, with a pattern of improvement since the last inspection. Students make good progress in some subjects; however, their progress has been less than good in others, for example English literature, mathematics and computing. Strategies are being put in place to deal with this. Students' progress is monitored regularly and appropriate targets set. Steps are being taken to raise standards and to provide a wider range of vocational options in what is currently a satisfactory curriculum, offering accreditation to those who do not flourish in a predominantly academic context. Students are responding enthusiastically but it is too early to judge the impact on overall levels of achievement.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with examples of good practice meeting students' needs and aspirations. Teachers have detailed subject knowledge but they do not always use varied teaching styles to challenge all students and encourage independent learning. Whilst valuing their teachers' knowledge and feedback, some students remain more dependent than is appropriate in the sixth form.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Sixth formers make a positive contribution to the school community, leading the school council and the student union, for example. They value the detailed support and advice they receive on career choices and application to higher education or further training and they feel well prepared for future employment. Leadership and management are working hard to establish a sustainable balance between the sixth form as integral to the school and sixth formers' wishes to be independent. In the process, there are differing expectations, for example over registration, attendance and punctuality.

What the school should do to improve further

- Share and monitor good practice to develop a variety of teaching styles that supports students' diverse learning needs across the school.
- Raise standards in the sixth form and encourage more independent learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Overall, standards are above average and students' achievement is good, satisfactory in the sixth form. Standards on entry to Year 7 are, on average, a little above those expected for students of that age. Since 2004 standards reached by the end of Year 9 have been rising and represent good progress. However, this varies from subject to subject. For example, progress in English and mathematics is good, while in science it is satisfactory. To raise standards, intensive support has been given to Year 7 students with low literacy levels. Flexible timetabling within some departments has allowed for similar targeting of students in other years. Progress made by all groups in Years 10 and 11 is good, with the percentage achieving five or more A*–C grades well above the national average. Emphasis on short-term tasks and regular testing has significantly reduced the gap between the achievement of boys and girls. The introduction of vocational courses that better match the needs and interests of some students has also helped to raise standards. Against national trends, in 2006 boys made slightly better progress than girls across Years 7 to 11. Well-directed support ensures that students with learning difficulties or disabilities progress at least as well as others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal, moral, social and cultural development and well-being are good. Most enjoy school and have positive attitudes to learning, especially when teaching is lively and stimulating. Attendance is continuing to improve in response to well-targeted action. Fixed-term exclusions are falling. Students say they feel safe because bullying is dealt with effectively, and the school has embraced a student initiative whereby any young person can seek adult support through its e-mail system. Behaviour is generally good. The environment is well respected and graffiti-free. Most students make healthy food and drink choices and keep fit. They develop good social skills and many show an awareness of cultural and ethnic traditions in the wider community. There are, however, limited opportunities for spiritual reflection. Well supported by the school, students' development of skills likely to enhance their future economic well-being is outstanding. Many join in the extensive extra-curricular programme and are happy to celebrate their successes and the achievements of others. Forming a rock group, fund raising or playing for one of the many school teams, for example, help students become engagingly confident, articulate and purposeful.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 11 and satisfactory in the sixth form. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and very good rapport with students. Training has improved staff understanding of learning styles but this does not always lead to the variety of teaching methods needed to match students' needs. On occasion pace was seen to be slow, with students

listening inactively, whereas the good lessons observed included interactive learning, promoting achievement and enjoyment. Most teachers manage occasional low level disruption well, so classes are usually purposeful and calm.

Assessment and oral feedback are good, so students know how to improve. Whilst the marking of students' work is often regular and diagnostic, this process is insufficiently embedded across the school. Well-planned support for those with learning difficulties and disabilities helps them to achieve well. The most able students excel where lessons are actively challenging, in the arts, for example. A few parents expressed concerns about insufficiently challenging homework, but inspection found content and levels to be generally satisfactory.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is good, with an increasing range of options. The school's performing arts specialism is visible both within the curriculum and in extensive extra-curricular programmes. The mathematics and computing specialism has enhanced teaching and learning through extensive use of modern technologies. All students are encouraged to complete a certificated course in ICT by Year 11. Increasing flexibility, especially in Years 10 and 11, offers a broader and more advanced curriculum for able students. Early entry for GCSE French in Year 9, for example, enables students to study French to AS level or add GCSE Spanish in Year 10. There is an additional programme of activities and events for gifted and talented students. On those occasions when there is lack of differentiation in content and structure in lessons, the curriculum provision does not challenge the most able. The school's specialism in vocational education is reflected in an increasing range of courses to meet students' needs and enhance motivation without limiting access to core curriculum subjects. Although aspects of citizenship are embedded in the wider curriculum, there are limited opportunities for this subject as a distinct area of study; a co-ordinator is being appointed to manage this.

The school offers an extensive and well-supported programme of activities to complement the mainstream curriculum and support students' development of skills. Specialist status is demonstrated within the school and through its links with community arts groups and with other schools and colleges.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Procedures for ensuring students' safety are robust, with efficient staff recruitment arrangements and clear child protection practices. Academic progress is tracked systematically with rigorous procedures to ensure that students know what is expected of them and how to achieve their targets. Record-keeping is meticulous. Students' progress and personal development are carefully monitored and action taken as soon as problems start to take shape, in partnership with outside agencies whenever appropriate. Student review days are effective; the quality of information given to tutors enables them to communicate students' progress to them and to their parents or carers. Support for those with learning difficulties and disabilities is good, and these students achieve well. Registration periods are not always used productively; however, the school has plans in place to change this next year.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. There has been enterprise and drive in establishing partnerships with local schools and a college. Popular extension activities, such as music and dance, are a spur to students' personal development. Senior leaders ensure that they have detailed 'live' data so can make pragmatic and well-targeted responses as challenges arise, for example intervening early when a student looks vulnerable or disaffected. As a result, exclusion rates are falling and the achievements of students with learning disabilities or difficulties are good.

Expectations of staff are high. Following self-review, departments are developing strategies to raise standards through training and performance management for teachers and target-setting and progress-tracking for students. Implementation and monitoring of good practice are uneven. Senior management's emphasis on the need to understand and support varied learning styles has not always led to an effective variety of teaching method.

Financial management is outstanding; shrewd negotiations and careful monitoring ensure excellent value for money, with the education and well-being of students always the guiding factor. Led by its knowledgeable and purposeful chairman, the governing body makes an exemplary contribution to the school's continuing development. There are significant challenges from developments in post-16 education across the city, to which the school's leadership and management are responding with commitment and enterprise. The school's capacity to improve is good.

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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?	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	1	

The quality of provision

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

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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

Dear Students

Inspection of Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form College, Hove, BN3 7BW

Thank you for the cheerful friendliness with which you made our team welcome when we visited your school recently to see how well it is doing. We all appreciated the confident way you answered our questions, explained how systems work and shared your feelings about the school's special character and strengths. The pride you take in your own and others' achievements and your loyalty to Blatchington Mill support our judgement that yours is a good school, with a satisfactory sixth form, which is developing in a number of enterprising ways.

We could see that you make good progress in Years 7 to 11. Your overall results at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations are better than the national averages. In the sixth form, levels of achievement are good in many subjects, although not in quite all. We liked the way you get on with your teachers and are willing to learn, especially when lessons give you opportunities to work together, to be active, solve problems and show initiative. We were particularly impressed by the way in which you support each other, no matter what difficulties or disabilities any of you may have. Yours is a genuinely inclusive school where everyone has opportunities to do well in ways that match individual strengths and ambitions. You are well supported by your tutors and teachers.

So that you do as well as you possibly can, we have asked the school to make sure that all lessons involve a variety of pace, approach and activity to support the different ways in which you learn. We have also suggested that a greater range of teaching styles and opportunities for independent learning would benefit sixth formers.

You and your family or carers can help by ensuring that you come to school regularly throughout the term.

I wish you and your school continuing success.

Patricia Metham Her Majesty's Inspector