

The Hurst Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116422
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	290528
Inspection dates	29–30 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Timothy Gilson

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1015
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr N Godfrey
Headteacher	Mr M Christian
Date of previous school inspection	14 May 2001
School address	Brimpton Road Baughurst Tadley RG26 5NL
Telephone number	01189 817474
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Hurst Community College is a larger than average 11-16 specialist science school. It is a full service extended school providing a wide range of pre-school and adult services. The school is in its sixth year of specialist science designation. The attainment of the pupils on entry is broadly in line with other maintained mainstream secondary schools. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. The school serves a large catchment area with lower than national levels of deprivation and the vast majority of pupils are White British.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Hurst Community College is a satisfactory school with good features. This is a very caring school where pupils feel safe and valued. The pupils and staff enjoy warm and positive relationships, which lead to a calm, pleasant atmosphere around the school. Pupils say that they 'appreciate their teachers' hard work and the care that they show them'. The care given to all pupils is outstanding, particularly for those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Parents are supportive of the school. Pupils make satisfactory progress and by the time they leave school at the end of Key Stage 4, they achieve broadly average standards.

The pupils' personal development and well-being are good because of the good guidance and support they receive. For example, a number of parents referred to the good induction arrangements for pupils joining the school in Year 7. Pupils enjoy coming to the school and their behaviour is good. They welcome visitors with courtesy and are proud of their involvement in the school community. Pupils understand the need for a healthy lifestyle. Good support for pupils in Year 11 leaving to go on to college or work helps prepare them well for the next stage of their lives. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers know their subjects well and prepare thoroughly for their lessons. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and, as a result, pupil progress is satisfactory. The school has a good curriculum and a wide range of extra-curricular activities that enhance pupils' learning well.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher listens to the views of the staff, who feel valued and are well supported. Consequently, teaching staff work well together and have a strong shared approach to professional development. However, whole-school initiatives to raise standards have been implemented inconsistently so that achievement has not improved in the last three years and remains satisfactory. The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory as the school has a generally accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Extensive monitoring provides school leaders with a great deal of information. This is not used to set targets that are sufficiently challenging to produce sustained improvement. The school has made effective use of support from outside agencies. The school's capacity for improvement is satisfactory.

The school's specialist science status has not contributed to raising standards at the end of Key Stage 4 due to a lack of co-ordination and inconsistent leadership of this aspect of the school's work. There have been considerable staffing difficulties in science over the past two years and this has adversely affected the progress that pupils make and the standards they reach in this core subject and in the school's overall performance. However, achievement at Key Stage 3 in science in 2006 was good and there have been some improvements to the curriculum as result of the specialist status.

What the school should do to improve further

- Leaders at all levels should ensure that rigorous self-evaluation and the setting of challenging targets leads to improved achievement for pupils.
- Improve achievement and standards by ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good across the school.
- Improve the leadership and standards in science at Key Stage 4.

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

Pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average and at the end of Key Stage 4, the standards that pupils reach are in line with national expectations. The percentage of pupils achieving five GCSE grades at A*-C, including mathematics and English, has increased and is now above the national average. There is considerable variation between the achievement and standards that pupils reach in different subject areas. Standards and achievement are not good enough in science, which is the specialist area, dance and physical education. Areas of strength include art, geography, English literature and design and technology. Achievement and standards have fluctuated in the last three years without any overall improvement. Improved progress demonstrated in 2006 has not been sustained in 2007. The underachievement of pupils in science at Key Stage 4 has prevented standards rising both in science and the school overall. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, those from different ethnic groups and those with different levels of prior attainment is satisfactory. Girls achieve better than boys as is the case nationally. Targets set are not always sufficiently challenging to ensure that all pupils make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils value the support which they receive and enjoy good relationships with their teachers. Attendance has improved and is now above average demonstrating that pupils enjoy their lessons and the extra-curricular activities provided by the school. Pupils report that bullying is rare and when it does occur it is dealt with promptly and effectively. They feel safe and well supported by staff and appreciate the counselling service available to them. Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is good. They behave well in lessons and outside of the classroom and are courteous and supportive of each other. There is a harmonious and purposeful atmosphere around the school. Pupils gain a good insight into other cultures through numerous visits abroad and exchange links with schools in other countries. For example, pupils of a French school were present at the college during one day of the inspection.

The school council is an important, effective forum for pupils to raise issues and concerns. Pupils feel proud of being involved in key decisions such as the appointment of new teachers and the rewriting of the behaviour policy. Pupils act as responsible citizens by working with the local council on environmental issues such as the reduction of the speed limit outside of the school. Pupils contribute effectively to the wider community with fund raising activities, musical performances and a Christmas party for the elderly. This is a highlight of the school year. Pupils are increasingly willing to adopt healthy lifestyles. They are keen to participate in sporting activities and are actively involved in choosing healthy, but affordable, eating options. Pupils are well prepared for life after school through a good careers education programme, good support from the Connexions service and effective links with local colleges and prospective employers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent both within and between subjects. Consequently, pupils' progress in lessons is satisfactory and does not lead to consistent improvement in achievement. Teachers manage behaviour well and relationships between staff and pupils are good. Pupils are keen to learn and have good attitudes to their work. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, but in too many lessons there are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop their own ideas and understanding. Pupils respond well when given opportunities to work more independently of the teacher: for example, in a Year 10 science lesson pupils worked in pairs to design an experiment to test the strength of different materials and the teacher's well judged questioning enabled them to make good progress. Lessons are well organised but planning concentrates too much on tasks and activities rather than how pupils will make progress and develop their learning. Teaching meets the needs of pupils of different ability effectively when their prior attainment is used to plan appropriate activities. However, all too often pupils, regardless of ability or prior learning, are set the same task. As a result pupils are not always fully challenged to achieve their best and so make satisfactory, rather than good, progress. Strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning are not consistently applied. For example, not all teachers set clear learning objectives so that pupils understand what they are expected to learn. Professional development opportunities are well-structured and enable teachers to explore and share good practice. Despite being widely available, the good practice is not used consistently across the school to raise achievement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of its pupils. All statutory requirements are met and there is a wide range of options from which pupils can choose. The school regularly reviews its curriculum and effective guidance systems ensure that provision matches the pupils' needs. The integrated humanities course at GCSE allows pupils to consider a wide variety of social and moral issues and makes a good contribution to their overall personal development and well-being. Increased vocational provision, including a range of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications and further education college-based courses, has led to greater flexibility for pupils in Years 10 and 11. This has had a positive effect on motivation and attendance and the school has rightly identified further development of this area as a priority.

The school provides an extensive range of extra-curricular activities including sports, music, arts and drama opportunities and take up is high. Pupils are eager to take on positions of responsibility, contribute to a wide range of charities and value the sustainability focus of the school's environment days. The school is rightly proud of this aspect of its work and pupils make extensive contributions both to the school and to the wider community. Specialist status has enhanced the breadth of the curriculum by increasing the range of science courses on offer.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is fully committed to the care of all pupils. A well-established house system makes them feel part of a supportive community. Teachers know the pupils well because of the school's emphasis on building strong relationships. Care for pupils is outstanding and appreciated by pupils. One pupil said, 'My tutor is the most understanding person I can talk to.' The care provided for vulnerable pupils, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is excellent. As a result, these pupils feel secure and confident. The school has a 'zero-tolerance' policy towards any form of disruptive behaviour and makes effective use of behaviour support teachers and external agencies in supporting pupils with behavioural and emotional problems. Review days, held twice each year, give pupils a good opportunity to discuss their achievements and targets with tutors and parents, although this guidance does not always improve pupils' progress. There is good careers guidance on option choices at the end of Years 9 and 11. Secure and effective child protection procedures are in place and understood by all staff. Regular health and safety audits and risk assessments are rigorously monitored at a senior level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and the newly reconstituted leadership team, provide dedicated leadership. Leadership of the school's work on pupils' well-being and care is good but the focus on academic progress and achievement is insufficiently rigorous. As a result, pupils do not always achieve as well as they might. The school has effective and extensive systems for collecting data, including seeking the views of parents. This information is not always used well so that self-evaluation sometimes fails to identify and prioritise the key developments which will raise standards. For example, the school gathers information about teaching and learning through lesson observations and monitoring pupils' work. This information has not always been used effectively to improve the quality of teaching as weaknesses are not tackled rigorously and systematically. Similarly, the school improvement plan is detailed and comprehensive but neither focuses on pupils' progress nor indicates how the impact of initiatives will be measured. Middle leadership is inconsistent. Although there is good practice, for example in mathematics, art and geography, there is too much variation in the quality of subject leadership. This results in variations in the levels of achievement between subjects. The monitoring of achievement and implementation of whole-school systems in subject areas to raise achievement are inconsistent. The use of targets to raise standards is satisfactory. These targets are not always used by teachers to bring about more rapid progress in lessons. Governance is good as governors are well-informed, supportive and effective critical friends of the school. Likewise, parents are generally positive about all aspects of the school's work although a small minority expressed concerns about behaviour. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

12 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Hurst Community College, Tadley, RG26 5NL

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of the school. We enjoyed meeting you, seeing you at work and hearing your views. Thank you for making us feel welcome at your school. We were very impressed with your behaviour and the courtesy that you showed to us throughout the inspection. We found that The Hurst Community College is a satisfactory school with good features.

These are the strengths of the school.

- The headteacher and staff at the school care for you very well.
- The range of subjects and extra-curricular activities that you can choose is good.
- The way in which you contribute to the school and wider community through charities and involvement in the school council is good.
- Your behaviour and the systems that the school has to improve behaviour are good.
- It is clear that you have very good relationships with your teachers and enjoy coming to school.

The headteacher and leaders of the school know the areas where you could be doing better. They need to make sure that:

- the progress that you make in science is improved
- all your teachers can teach as well as your best teachers so that you can make good progress in all lessons
- the standards that you reach at GCSE are improved.

You can help by making sure that you work hard and are prepared to take responsibility for your learning. Try not to rely too much on the teacher to do all the thinking for you. We hope that you will work together to make sure that you all do as well as you can and we wish you well for future.

Yours faithfully

Timothy Gilson

Lead Inspector