

Bristnall Hall Technology College

Inspection report - amended

Unique Reference Number	104016
Local Authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	308484
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2007
Reporting inspector	David Driscoll

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	951
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lynne Hemmings
Headteacher	Steve Venross
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Bristnall Hall Lane Oldbury B68 9PA
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Age group	11-16
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Amended Report Addendum

Report amended due to a change to the report following a complaint

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Bristnall has been a specialist technology college since 2003. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is well above average, although almost all students are fluent in English. Just under one in every three students has a learning difficulty or disability. This is much higher than in most other schools, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational need. The school operates a learning support unit (LSU) that provides support for students of all abilities whenever they may need it.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Bristnall Hall provides a satisfactory education. Students arrive and leave with standards that are below average, but the school ensures that they are adequately equipped with the skills they will need in later life. Students' achievement is satisfactory overall. While students of middle ability make progress as a result of teachers' good subject knowledge and work that is generally well planned to meet their needs, the most able students and those with learning difficulties do not always do as well as they could. For the most able, the problems arise in English and mathematics, where the work they are given is sometimes too easy for them. Students with learning difficulties have well thought out targets, although teachers do not use them in lessons to ensure that the work set meets their individual needs, they are considered when planning lessons. Students needing support from the LSU invariably make very good progress in their time there. Teachers make good use of computer technology to enliven lessons and to improve students' skills in information and communication technology (ICT). The college has used the benefits of its specialist status well to improve the curriculum in ICT and this has paid dividends, not just in improving students' skills but also in raising the proportion of students leaving with five or more good GCSEs.

The college has had some notable successes recently in improving attendance and reducing exclusions to a more satisfactory level. A new behaviour management system called 'behaviour for learning' has stopped minor misbehaviour from escalating to a more serious level. However, not all staff use the system, so low-level disruption continues to slow the pace in some lessons. The student council helped to draw up 'consequences' and many other students also play a good part in the school community by acting as peer mentors.

The college has made steady progress since it was last inspected. Senior managers gain a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching, so are able to identify the main areas where improvement is required. They go to great lengths to obtain the views of parents and students, but do not take enough account of the standards reached by students when judging the impact of what the school provides. Governors have been particularly rigorous in checking that actions to improve attendance and behaviour have proved successful.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers are aware of targets for students with learning difficulties, so they can plan lessons more precisely to meet their needs.
- Provide more challenging work for the most able students in English and mathematics.
- Ensure that procedures for managing behaviour are applied consistently by all staff.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Overall, students make satisfactory progress to leave college with standards that are below the national average. Students of middle ability and those with disabilities generally do well. However, those with other learning difficulties do not always reach the standards of which they are capable. Students' good progress in ICT, coupled with effective use of academic target-setting, has boosted the proportion of students leaving with five or more GCSEs at grade C or above. However, when English and mathematics are included, the figure is much lower with just over a third of pupils gaining a C grade in both of these subjects. This is because not enough higher ability students are reaching the higher levels in these subjects. Those students

who fall behind in their work and are supported in the LSU make very good progress to make up any ground they have lost.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

A particular strength of the school is the contribution students make to their community. Students take advantage of opportunities to influence school policy and participate actively in charity events, such as Children in Need. Students accept responsibility readily through acting as members of the student council and as peer mentors. They are confident, articulate and have a clear sense of how they would like to improve their school. Students are quick to help their friends in lessons if they need support. Students have a sound understanding of how to live healthily and they enjoy taking regular exercise. While most students attend regularly and feel safe at school, a minority perceive bullying to be an issue that affects their enjoyment of learning. The school has taken this seriously and investigated their concerns. The school continues to work with the students to ensure that bullying does not take place. Students have a clear sense of right and wrong, although a minority find it hard to stick to the rules and are disruptive in lessons. Although the number of exclusions has been reduced, it is still quite high. The number of permanent exclusions remains low. Students show satisfactory regard for others but their appreciation of other cultures is limited.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In most lessons, teachers make learning fun and students enjoy working individually or in groups to consolidate their knowledge. Teachers are good at using large whiteboards attached to computers to illustrate topics. Students gain much from their use, for example, studying vivid photographs of the seaside to improve their use of descriptive language. Although teachers' planning is thorough and identifies clearly the range of activities that students are expected to complete, it does not always identify tasks that meet the wide range of abilities in the class, even when pupils are grouped according to their ability. Lessons are usually pitched at the level of middle ability students, so they make good progress. But more able students are sometimes held back, especially in English and mathematics, while lower attaining pupils occasionally struggle to understand the work. Teachers give students the confidence to ask and answer questions and check regularly on their understanding. As one teacher put it, 'Tell me if you don't understand because that's my fault, not yours.' All teachers provide lots of encouragement for students to do their best. Some teachers are very good at managing students' behaviour and ensure that they cover a lot of work in lessons. Some others, however, allow students to call out, chatter to each other, or distract each other by fiddling with resources such as rulers. This wastes time and restricts students' progress. Teachers' good subject knowledge shows in the confident way they explain things to students and clear up misunderstandings. Assessment is accurate, and enables students and teachers to see how well they are doing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides many opportunities for students to use ICT. This not only improves their skills, but also enhances their enjoyment of lessons. However, opportunities to improve

other basic skills, especially in literacy and numeracy, are not provided consistently across subjects. The college has wisely changed the courses in Years 10 and 11 to allow students to study for more GCSEs in ICT, which has raised standards and improved achievement. There is a good range of vocational courses available, which are better suited to meet the needs of some students. However, their potential benefits have not yet been fully realised. All students follow a programme of personal, social and health education, but students do not always value this, either because lessons are too short or because teachers just let students chat instead of teaching them. The college offers a wide range of enrichment activities, particularly sport, which students enjoy and which help them to live a healthier lifestyle.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

There are good, and highly flexible, support arrangements in the LSU for those students who have worries or concerns, and are consequently falling behind in their work. Here, students' problems are sorted out through specific help that is tailored to their individual needs, and when appropriate draws external assistance. This has a strong impact on their behaviour, as well as contributing to good progress in their learning. The use of 'behaviour for learning', together with the effective use of the isolation room, is improving behaviour and has already helped to reduce exclusions. Where 'behaviour for learning' is used, lessons are allowed to continue at a good pace. However, some staff are not using it, so their lessons are more likely to suffer from low level disruption. The reduction in exclusions is also helping to improve attendance. However, the main reason for improving attendance lies with the tireless work that staff do to encourage parents to ensure their children attend whenever possible. Parents speak highly of arrangements for students new to the school which help students to settle quickly. The new tracking systems help the school to check the level of progress made by individual students. For example, these systems work well in Year 11 in identifying and tackling underachievement. Results are used to accurately allocate support through learning mentors and academic coaches to those who most need it. The systems are now in use in other years, but have not been in place long enough to be truly effective. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of their current standards, and the challenging targets they are aiming for. This has proved to be effective in raising overall standards. However, they do not always receive enough guidance, either through marking or in lessons, on what they have to do to reach their targets. Students with learning difficulties have clear targets, and guidance on how to achieve them. However, teachers do not have access to this information in lessons. This means that they are not able to provide enough individual guidance to ensure that these students' needs are met.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Senior managers carry out thorough checks on what the college provides, especially in terms of teaching. This allows them to accurately identify the main priorities for improvement and draw up plans to address them. However, links are not always sufficiently made between what the college provides and its outcomes in terms of standards and achievements. So, whilst managers correctly evaluate the school's overall performance as satisfactory, their evaluation of teaching and the curriculum as good is too generous. This is because they do not place enough emphasis on weaknesses when weighing them against strengths. For example, a lesson

may be described as good, because it has many strengths and only one weakness. The weakness may, however, be very important, such as students only making satisfactory progress.

Senior staff write good action plans to improve aspects of the college's work. However, they do not ensure that all staff consistently implement these actions, and this reduces their effectiveness. Governors have played a strong part in holding the senior managers to account when attendance fell and exclusions reached a worrying level, but they are not so rigorous when challenging the college's academic performance.

The college manages its specialist status well. Improvements to resources and the curriculum have raised achievement, while better links with partner schools are improving standards in design and technology on entry to the college.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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	3
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

5 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Bristnall Hall Technology College, Oldbury, B68 9PA

Thank you for helping us and telling us what you thought about your education when we recently visited your college.

We found that you are receiving a satisfactory education. Those of you who are good at English and mathematics told us that you often find the work a bit easy, so we have asked your teachers to give you work that really makes you think hard. Some of you find learning particularly difficult and need extra help. The support given by the LSU is good, but teachers do not always know the best way to help those who are struggling. So we have asked the headteacher to make sure that teachers are given all the information they need to help you make better progress.

We were impressed by your skills in ICT, and the way that your teachers use ICT to make lessons more enjoyable for you. We were most impressed by the way you play a part in running the college through the student council, and the way you are always ready to help one another. You are coming to school more often now, and there is less misbehaviour in lessons since 'consequences' were introduced. However, we have asked the headteacher to make sure that all your teachers use 'consequences' in all your lessons.

The college has been steadily getting better since it was last inspected. Much of this is because the headteacher has made sure that it has gained from being a specialist technology college. In particular, you improve your ICT skills more quickly and get to use them more often in other lessons.

With all best wishes for your futures

David Driscoll Lead Inspector