

Park House School and Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110052
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	310187
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Nigel Fletcher 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 (total)	1275
Sixth form	266
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Marson
Headteacher	Mr D Peaple
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003
School address	Andover Road Newbury RG14 6NQ
Telephone number	01635 573911
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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

Park House School and Sports College is a large comprehensive school on the southern edge of Newbury. The majority of its students are from the immediate vicinity, with the rest from the local rural community. A large majority of the students are White British, and there are very few whose first language is not English. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than the national average, although the proportion with statements of special educational needs is higher. Park House School became a specialist sports college in 1998 and gained the Sportsmark Gold award in 2000.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Park House School is a good and improving school where students achieve well and develop good personal skills. Parents view it as a 'good positive environment in which children can grow and learn'. Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. Standards reached by the students are above those found nationally and students make good progress in their learning at Key Stages 3 and 4. Many parents reported that their children enjoyed school. As one said, 'Both my children are happy there and thrive with the support of the teachers.' Students enjoy good relationships with their teachers. The quality of teaching is good overall with some examples of outstanding practice, as is the support provided to those with learning difficulties and disabilities. However, in a few lessons, insufficient attention is given to providing interest and challenge to the students and their concentration is allowed to wander. Although attendance is satisfactory, there is too much unauthorised absence that detracts from the progress of the pupils involved.

School leaders are fully aware of how well the school is doing. They have a very good understanding of its strengths and the means by which it can improve further, for example, by improving the quality of teaching and learning. The senior leadership team provides good leadership to a committed staff. There is a strong ethos of continual improvement in both academic and personal achievement which pervades the whole school. There is a sense of common purpose that is shared by staff and students alike. School leaders have the full support of staff, parents and a strong governing body, although some parents would like better communication with the school.

Many parents agree that, 'The staff try to get the best out of the pupils in the way they 'value success for all'.' The school has a caring and inclusive ethos, both within the school and in the outside community. Students respect their teachers and peers in a calm, productive learning environment. They feel safe and are confident about the good care and support they receive from staff. Behaviour is good around the school. Bullying is rare, and parents report that, when it does happen, it is dealt with quickly, effectively and sympathetically. There are no age or social barriers amongst the students. Older students are willing to help the younger students both in and out of lessons. Many have signed up as peer mentors, and to assist in lessons lower down the school. Students have good awareness of the need for a healthy lifestyle, particularly in their high levels of participation in extra-curricular sport and dance. The school also plays a significant part in the local and wider community, for example, in its provision of sports for children with disabilities in the community, and through its links with Indian children, initiated under a 'Wealth and Poverty' project.

The curriculum is exemplary. Through effective planning and timetabling the school provides excellent opportunities for students to study a wide range of academic and vocational subjects appropriate to their individual needs, and to participate in the many additional sporting, cultural and personal development activities. The school's sports specialism has a good impact on improving learning across the school. Students value the dimension that this brings across the different areas of the curriculum, and how it pervades the culture of the school. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection and has a strong capacity to continue to improve. Many parents supported the observation of one who said, 'I can acknowledge the hard work and commitment of teachers and managers who, through their team-work, have ensured that my children have had every opportunity to make good progress through the educational system.'

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory education. Students achieve in line with national averages and make satisfactory progress. The school provides a good curriculum, which benefits from a broad range of enrichment activities. Although there is some good and outstanding teaching, the overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In some subjects, students are given insufficient challenge to enable more to achieve the highest grades. Improved systems for setting students' targets, analysing assessment data and monitoring their progress are leading to more consistent practice across departments.

Students' personal development is good. They contribute well to the life of the school and the community, for example, through in-class support for younger students. They enjoy their learning and appreciate the good relationships they have with staff and the advice they receive when considering subject and career options. Attendance and punctuality in the sixth form are good. Regular sessions are held with tutors to discuss their progress against targets. However, there is inconsistency in the quality of this support. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory but recent staff changes have enabled the school to gain a clear picture of what needs to be done to raise standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the quality of teaching to ensure that lessons consistently meet the needs of all students.
- Improve standards and achievement of students in the sixth form.
- Reduce the level of unauthorised absence of students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students achieve well in national tests at Key Stages 3 and 4, and reach standards that are above the national average. In both key stages, performance has continued to improve and both boys and girls make good progress.

Attainment of the higher grades at GCSE is significantly above the national average, as is the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Nearly all students achieved at least one grade A* to G. Although grades were generally high across the school, there is still some variation in achievement between subjects. The school is fully aware of what needs to be done to improve performance in those subjects, and improvements can clearly be seen. The school analyses the performance of specific groups of students and takes action to address any differences. For example, the school recognised that boys with lower ability did not achieve as well as their peers. It now runs additional courses for underachieving students. As a result, the positive impact of the school's intervention can be seen in the better progress being made by these students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students value the support which they receive and the good relationships they have with their teachers. Their attendance is satisfactory, although there is too much unauthorised absence. The majority of students are well behaved and any instances of poor behaviour are managed

well by staff. Students feel safe and report that bullying is rare and is dealt with effectively once made known to a teacher. Older students provide very good role models as mentors and are actively involved in supporting younger students and those who are vulnerable.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. In lessons and assemblies they reflect upon events and moral issues and express their thoughts and feelings well. They are thoughtful and supportive of each other, and proud of their school. Through the school's sports specialism there is a wide range of opportunities for students to develop their social skills, self-confidence and leadership qualities within and outside the school.

The school council enables students to play an active role in the decision making of the school. They make a good contribution to the wider community through, for example, helping in local primary schools, fundraising activities and musical performances at charity events. Well-targeted literacy and numeracy support, sound ICT skills, and many work and enterprise related activities prepare students well for their future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students' enthusiasm for learning makes a significant contribution to the good teaching and learning. Strong relationships between teachers and students create the right conditions for learning so that students achieve well. Students are not afraid to make mistakes because they know that most teachers will help them to refine their ideas and correct their thinking. Learning objectives are clearly identified so that students and teachers are clear about the purpose of the lesson. Classroom assistants and older students support the learning of students well in many lessons to help ensure that all students make good progress.

In the best lessons, students are actively engaged through tasks that are exciting and enable them to be adventurous and creative in their thinking. Teachers use assessment information effectively to tailor work to the specific needs of students and ensure that they are challenged appropriately. However, some lessons are uninspiring and too directed by teachers, with limited opportunities for students to work on their own or in groups. In these lessons, questioning, to promote learning, is ineffective. Students do not always know what level they are working at and how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Students follow a personalised curriculum which meets their needs very well. Recent programme changes have allowed a wider range of opportunities for older students. For example, timetabling is sufficiently flexible to enable a Year 11 student to take a Year 10 science course, some additional GCSEs as part of the enrichment programme, and an AS course with Year 12 students. About a quarter of the students, including the gifted and talented, take additional qualifications outside the school day, a high proportion. The results from these extended programmes are very good and add to the high standards and achievement in the school.

The variety of vocational and academic courses at Key Stage 4 ensures that most are motivated to succeed and provides excellent pathways into, and within, the sixth form or into employment. Access to work experience opportunities, and the citizenship programme contribute much to their enjoyment of school life. Specialist status has a positive impact, with a wide range of

qualifications offered in sport and PE. There is a full and diverse programme of extra-curricular activities, which students enjoy and readily participate in, for example music, dance and sport. Theme weeks, such as that on the Beijing Olympics, add excitement and inspiration across the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Harmonious relationships ensure that students feel safe and well cared for, and parents recognise that 'Pastoral care and a welcoming friendly ethos has always been a high priority.' Risk assessment and safeguarding procedures are secure and regularly reviewed. Close links with local primary schools ensure that the new students settle quickly and happily into Year 7. Good information and guidance is provided on option choices at the end of Years 8 and 11. However, advice at Key Stage 3 is not sufficiently detailed to influence students' choices with regard to possible careers.

Additional learning support is good although students are not always sufficiently challenged in group sessions. The school provides exceptionally well for vulnerable students who become happy and settled at school. As one student said, 'I value the excellent personal support offered to me by the Learning Support.' The school makes effective use of external agencies and its own resources in supporting students at risk of exclusion. Students' attendance is satisfactory and improving as a result of a robust intervention system and close contact with parents and carers.

The tracking and reviewing of students' progress have improved significantly through an effective centralised data system. As a result, academic guidance is good, and underachieving students are offered additional mentoring and support. However, the information is not used consistently by all departments in order to have a full impact on students' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads the school well and is ably supported by his strong and cohesive senior leadership team. Good evaluation of the school's effectiveness is based on a wide range of evidence, including accurate assessment of students' progress. Many of the actions taken so far are having a positive impact on the school's development, demonstrating that it is well placed for further improvement. Leaders and managers at all levels subscribe fully to the current focus on improving learning. A few are at an early stage in developing their management skills and consequently some departments are moving forward more rapidly than others. Nevertheless, the impact can be seen in rising achievement across the school. A number of management roles have been imaginatively re-designated so that improving standards can be maintained. For example, heads of learning in each year group monitor academic progress and are increasingly effective in identifying students who need additional support.

The school has strong links with its local and wider community and its promotion of community cohesion is excellent. Particularly noteworthy is its partnership with a local housing authority to promote living and working together and in resolving friction between two housing estates. Links with world-wide communities feature strongly, for example, through sending school sports ambassadors to work with children in South African townships.

Governance is good. Governors are developing their ability to hold the school to account under the clear, knowledgeable leadership of the chair. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and respond effectively to major areas of concern. For example, a joint working group of senior leaders and governors are spearheading strategies for improving sixth form achievement.

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

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/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	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 learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

01 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Park House School and Sports College, Newbury, RG14 6NQ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, talking to your teachers and other staff, and visiting lessons. Many of you and your parents told us how the caring and supportive environment, and your good relationships with teachers, meant that you enjoy school and feel safe there. We judged your school to be a very caring school that is providing you with a good education. We were particularly impressed by:

- your attitude to learning and the way in which your confidence and self-esteem develops as you move through the school
- the courses and other activities that the school provides to ensure that you have the best opportunities to make good progress in your academic and personal development
- the way the school cares for, and supports you in your learning, and when you have other problems or concerns
- the way the school is led by senior staff, and the commitment of its staff to your education and well-being.

To make your school even better we have recommended that:

- it raises the overall quality of teaching and learning to enable you to enjoy all your lessons and improve your results further in national tests
- it helps you to gain good grades in your exams in the sixth form
- you improve your attendance at lessons.

The senior staff and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school and have plans to do it. We believe that if you attend and behave well and work hard in lessons, and help the school put these plans in place, then standards will rise. On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Fletcher

Her Majesty's Inspector