

Hockerill Anglo-European College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117598
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312668
Inspection date	3 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	754
6th form	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Carole Pluckrose-Oliver
Headteacher	Dr Robert B Guthrie
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Dunmow Road Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 5HX
Telephone number	01279 658451
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the varying achievement of some students in some subject areas; the quality of the curriculum and the impact of the specialist language and music status; the quality of teaching and learning; the quality of leadership and management at all levels. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, by observing lessons, scrutinising the school's records of students' standards and achievement and other documentation, and by discussions with students and staff. Parents' responses to questionnaires also informed judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were other than justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The Hockerill Anglo-European College, a specialist languages and music college, serves students from both home and abroad. There is boarding provision on the school site for close to a third of the students. A similar proportion of students come from a wide spectrum of minority ethnic backgrounds but none is at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is low, as is the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Post-16 students follow courses within the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme. The college is heavily over-subscribed and students' attainment on entry to the college is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Hockerill Anglo-European College is an outstandingly effective school that is fiercely ambitious for its students. 'It is a dynamic place to work' commented a member of staff. Students, too, consider it is 'a great place to be'. The overwhelming majority of parents also agree that this high performing language and music specialist college does exceptionally well by its students. 'The school takes every opportunity to build students' self-esteem. They really believe they can achieve anything they set their minds to' wrote a parent. Some parents, however, would welcome greater opportunities for involvement in the life of the school.

These views closely match the school's own evaluation of its provision. The sustained progress on all fronts since the last very positive inspection is underpinned by its work as a training school and the excellent leadership of both the main school and the boarding provision. Teaching has developed even further and the outstanding practice within modern foreign languages has spread throughout the curriculum. The college has managed its accommodation as well as it can to match its vision of becoming 'the best institution of its type world-wide'. However, staff and parents are frustrated by the site's limitations that set boundaries on the rate of development. Despite this, Hockerill's capacity to improve is strong.

The school rightly prides itself on the international dimension within its innovative and outstanding curriculum. This is linked closely to its languages specialism and to the boarding provision. Many staff and students, particularly boarders, have experience of education overseas. The school builds successfully on these experiences through well-established links with partner schools in Europe and Asia. Notably, students experience very effective teaching and learning in the humanities and other subject modules in either French or German. Highlights of the school year include shared design and technology and drama events with partner European schools, and the international weekend for boarders. The Middle Years IB programme increasingly enhances the curriculum for younger students. There is a very diverse range of out-of-hours activities with sport and music front-runners, reflecting the school's second specialism.

Students' personal development is outstanding. All students, including boarders, enjoy school and this is reflected in their exemplary behaviour, their mature and willing shouldering of responsibilities and in the harmonious relationships between students and between staff and students. The recent enhancement of the specialist music provision together with the resulting wider range of available activities has added significantly to students' enthusiasm for school. A real strength of the school is the way students are involved in decision-making through many opportunities such as the school council. Students are committed to leading healthy life styles and to keeping fit, both mentally and physically. Within the school's international environment, students feel safe and secure and appreciate their own and others' cultural traditions. Hockerill students make a difference to others' lives through their contributions both within the school and in the wider community. They not only adopt a hands-on approach to improving its physical conditions, for example, but also raise funds for a special school in Romania. Students have a true sense of global citizenship. Above all, students are exceptionally well prepared for their future economic well-being through their very positive academic and social achievements. Students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is outstanding.

Hockerill has sustained and improved exceptionally high standards over many years. Students of all ages achieve outstandingly well because of the excellent teaching and the curriculum which matches the needs of most. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make

fast progress and achieve of their best. Students are especially successful in modern foreign languages, reflecting the school's first specialism. Close to 90 per cent of students, almost double that nationally, gained at least five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, in 2007. Younger students, too, achieved exceptionally well, not only in national tests but also in GCSE examinations in languages. Post-16 students also made rapid progress in their IB courses, averaging the equivalent of four A-grades in advanced level courses. Only a very small number of students did not achieve as well as expected, given their test outcomes at the end of Year 9. This is partly because they found the very high number of GCSE courses expected of them too challenging. A few also made slower than expected progress in mathematics between Years 9 and 11.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Maintaining this high quality is at the heart of the school's staff development programme that currently has a focus on checks on students' learning in individual lessons. Excellent knowledge and personal enthusiasm for subjects is a common strength of teaching at Hockerill. Skilful and challenging questioning regularly develops and extends students' understanding as do the variety of activities and learning styles in the most successful lessons. Teachers do their best to compensate for the lack of permanent teaching rooms but this sometimes limits the resources available for learning.

Carefully considered whole-school procedures identify students' progress regularly. The care, guidance and support for students, both academic and personal are exceptional so that all students, including boarders, thrive. The stable and secure school environment ensures individuals are valued and helped as necessary. Links with external agencies are well established and students' needs are dealt with promptly.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The sustained improvements at Hockerill over many years owe much to the inspirational leadership of the principal and his very capable, committed senior team. All focus sharply on improving students' performance but at the same time ensuring their participation in a very extensive range of wider opportunities. Rigorous and honest self-evaluation pervades all areas of the school. All staff have a real sense of collective accountability for school improvement, exemplified in the excellent teamwork between teachers and boarding house tutors. Governance is excellent. Led by an able chair, governors provide the school with 'creatively critical' support that does not intrude on its smooth day-to-day running. Clear direction and the determination to be even better, characterises the school's planning. It is very actively seeking ways to manage the security of the school site ever more effectively.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The provision for sixth-form students is outstanding. At the end of Year 11, standards are very high. Approximately half of the students then leave the college at the end of Year 11 to follow A-level rather than IB courses elsewhere. The majority of students joining Year 12 are from overseas and have English as an additional language. Students make excellent progress and achieve examination results that are well above those reached internationally in the IB. The proportion of students continuing from Year 12 to Year 13 and completing their course is exceptionally high. Almost all students go on to university courses in the United Kingdom or abroad, including gaining places at Oxford and Cambridge.

The high quality of teaching and students' positive and enthusiastic approach to their studies contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the sixth form. Students greatly appreciate the

excellent personal and academic care and guidance they receive. They relish the very positive relationships they share with staff and with each other. Sixth-form students are very actively involved in the life of the college and provide excellent role models for younger students. They undertake a wide range of responsibilities with dignity and efficiency, acting as prefects, mentors and tour guides. The post-16 curriculum is greatly enriched by a very broad range of extra-curricular activities, links with other schools at home and abroad, and good opportunities for involvement in the local community. Such experiences provide a valuable counterbalance to classroom studies and extend students' personal development very effectively. The excellent leadership and management of the sixth form, both thoughtful and incisive, promotes a clear and ambitious vision for its future.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 0

Boarding provision at Hockerill is excellent and is exceptionally well led and managed. The airy and comfortable accommodation is well maintained in line with the requirements of the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI). The most recent inspection in November 2006 indicates that all aspects meet or exceed the national minimum requirements for this type of provision. The staff of all four age-related boarding facilities make significantly positive contributions to the personal development of the students, many of whom are from overseas. Very good relationships between students, teachers and boarding house tutors ensure students are safe, happy and successfully supported. The extensive range of after-school activities and opportunities dovetails very effectively with the mainstream curriculum to provide a 'unique and holistic educational experience' for boarders. The school has dealt efficiently and fully with the single recommendation made by CSCI at the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that students are not unnecessarily overburdened with too many GCSE courses when they find the work too challenging.
- Ensure that all students make the best possible progress in mathematics between Years 9 and 11.

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	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?	1	1
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?	1	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
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

4 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Hockerill Anglo-European College, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 5HX

After our visit to Hockerill, we would like to share our findings with you and thank you for your exceptionally friendly welcome and for taking the time to talk to us. You tell us that school is 'fantastic' and we agree with you. You are very appreciative of the scholarly teaching and also very keen on modern languages, music, sport and the wide range of clubs.

The school looks after you exceptionally well. Those of you who are boarders benefit greatly from the excellent teamwork between the house and school staff. You tell us you feel safe and that there is always someone to turn to if you need help. You speak highly of your teachers' readiness to assist you. Many of you make a positive difference to others through the college council, through your various house and other duties and through your involvement in international projects. Because of the hard work of your excellent principal, governors and committed teachers, you are achieving exceptionally well. This opens the door to a wide range of further educational and training opportunities both at Year 11 and at the end of the sixth form.

Because you cooperate so well with what your school is trying to do for you, we are convinced that you will continue to support your teachers' efforts and go from strength to strength in developing your personal skills as well as your academic prowess. We have asked your teachers, however, to make sure that some of you are not over-stretched by the very high number of GCSE courses you study. A few of you could achieve more in mathematics.

We wish you and the school a very successful future.

Sheila Nolan

Lead inspector