

Brockhill Park Performing Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118830
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313108
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Stephen Long 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1147
Sixth form	177
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Hill
Headteacher	Sonette Schwartz
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2004
School address	Sandling Road Saltwood Saltwood CT21 4HL
Telephone number	01303 265521
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Brockhill Park is a larger-than-average school and has specialist status for the performing arts. The students complete Key Stage 3 by the end of Year 8 and make a start on courses such as GCSEs in Year 9 rather than Year 10 as is the norm. The school houses a farm and a theatre. The majority of students are White British with a growing number from other ethnic backgrounds, some of whom have first languages other than English. The school serves a community with some pockets of social deprivation. There are grammar schools in the area and the students' attainment on entry is well below the national average with few higher attaining students joining the school. An above average proportion of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities although fewer than average have a statement of special educational needs. Of those with significant needs, the majority have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, behavioural difficulties or are on the autistic spectrum. The headteacher joined the school at the start of this academic year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Brockhill Park is a good school which has made good progress since the last inspection, both in respect of the standards achieved and students' personal development. The school raises students' aspirations and enables them to meet challenging targets. Specialist status makes a strong impact and is a core aspect of the school's identity. The impact on the performing arts curriculum has been outstanding and the standards reached are among the highest in the country. Across the curriculum as a whole, students now reach broadly average standards by the end of Key Stage 4, although standards in mathematics and English are below average and achievement varies between subjects when measured against schools nationally.

The students' personal development and well-being are good because the school is a caring and supportive community. Their behaviour and attitudes have improved since the last inspection and are good. The majority of students develop good social and team-working skills which set them up well for later life. Most parents and carers believe the school does a good job, with one saying in her questionnaire: 'On the many occasions I've visited the school, whether for parents' evenings or the Christmas fair, I've found the students to be helpful, polite and confident young people.' The majority of students enjoy school and attend well. However, some do not come to school regularly enough, on some occasions, because parents or carers take them on holiday during term time to the detriment of their achievement.

Teaching and learning have improved and are good with examples of outstanding teaching. Strengths are particularly evident in the performing arts and the influence of teaching in this area is spreading, although some inconsistencies remain. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same good overall progress as their peers because of the effective support they receive.

The curriculum is well planned to make learning interesting and relevant to the students. The flexibility afforded by the increased time available at Key Stage 4 and the range of courses on offer are strong features which students appreciate. The school is successful in fostering students' creativity and has been recognised with a national award for its work. The farm is an unusual and popular aspect of the school, making a positive contribution to students' academic and personal development.

Good leadership and management have played a key role in the improvements made. The new headteacher is well placed to continue the trend. Described as 'inspirational' by staff, she has made a good impact since her arrival and together with the senior team, demonstrates good capacity to develop the school further. Many other staff in positions of responsibility offer good support. However, some, notably subject leaders, do not focus closely enough on students' achievement when monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and the curriculum in their areas. This hinders them in identifying improvements required or when checking the impact of steps taken and leads to the variations in achievement in different subjects.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory with strengths in the students' personal development. The students stay on in good numbers and make satisfactory progress from relatively low academic starting points. They do well in some subjects while in others they do not achieve enough and overall standards are below average against all schools nationally when they leave. The school laudably

seeks to raise students' aspirations and enable them to progress to further and higher education by offering advanced level study. However, some start such courses without the necessary prior attainment and cannot manage the work required. The curriculum does not build as well as it might on the strength in vocational subjects for less academically able students at Key Stage 4. As with younger students, specialist performing arts subjects are very successful and offer a model for what can be achieved when sixth form programmes offer a secure progression in learning. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory. Teachers are enthusiastic about what they do but lessons are not always matched closely enough to students' needs to secure good progress over time. Students are well informed of the progress they are making and receive good guidance as to what to do after leaving. Relationships between students and tutors are good and the students are well cared for through the tutoring system. The students rise well to the challenge of the school's expectations of good behaviour, mature attitudes and a positive contribution to school life. Sixth form leadership is satisfactory but improvements in standards and the quality of provision are patchy. Too little attention is paid to students' achievement and the appropriateness of provision when making decisions about how to develop the sixth form further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance for all age groups.
- Ensure subject leaders focus consistently on students' achievement when evaluating provision and planning improvement in their areas so that achievement is good across all subjects.
- Improve the extent to which the sixth form curriculum and teaching meet the needs of all students and enable them to make good progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good progress during Key Stage 3. They do well in end-of-key-stage tests in mathematics, English and science when their starting points are considered, although the standards reached are below average. Progress is best in mathematics and English and improving in science. Good progress continues in Key Stage 4 with outstanding achievement in areas such as dance and drama and in vocational courses, including animal care. Standards have risen in recent years and are now broadly average so that the proportion of students gaining at least five GCSEs at A* to C is well above average. The school has done very well in raising the numbers gaining both mathematics and English at grade A* to C, although this remains below the national average. While performance in many subjects has improved, this is not universally the case and progress is too slow in some subjects.

Sixth form students' make satisfactory progress overall although there are variations in the progress made in different subjects at A and AS level. Students do very well in some areas, including performing arts and media studies, where standards are very high. Nevertheless, in other subjects they do not always make enough progress and the standards reached are below average overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The majority of students develop positive relationships with each other and with adults, whose support they value. Behaviour is good, reflecting students' good social and moral development. Most students enjoy school and feel safe and well cared for. Attendance, although improving

in the sixth form, is below average. Students' spiritual and cultural development is good, enhanced by performing arts status in broadening their cultural understanding. The students contribute well to the life of the school. The Student Voice, an elected group of representatives, undertakes its responsibilities seriously. New developments, such as the election of a student as school president, have been welcomed and sixth formers take a leading role in school life. Students contribute well to the local community, including giving performances in the area and raising funds for charity. They have a good understanding of how to live healthy lives through participation in sport and eating well. Their preparation for the next stages in their lives is satisfactory. They develop good teamwork skills, enjoy participating in enterprise events and go on to further or higher education and work in good numbers. However, standards in literacy and numeracy are below average and this restricts the options for some as to what they can do after leaving.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most lessons have clear objectives for learning and contain a challenging range of well-planned, and often practical, activities. Progress is slower in the minority of occasions where tasks are insufficiently varied to match students' differing attainment levels. Teachers are enthusiastic about their work in most cases. Students respond well to this and relationships with them and with teaching assistants are good. Lessons often involve good use of assessment techniques. Many teachers use questioning well to check and extend students' understanding and provide guidance. Peer- and self-assessment effectively engage students in deciding how to improve. Teachers' verbal feedback is often very useful in helping students move on. Students' progress is monitored well although some parents want more opportunities to talk directly with subject teachers about how their children are getting on. Well-qualified specialist staff show real expertise when helping students with behavioural issues, and those with specific learning difficulties like dyslexia, to make good progress. This is reflected in the words of a parent who said, 'My child has learning difficulties and health issues and the school has been very understanding and helpful.'

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The Key Stage 3 curriculum builds good skills for further study. The increased time available at Key Stage 4 is used innovatively to meet students' needs through a wide range of GCSE and vocational courses. The latter are popular because of their clear structure and assessment procedures which students find motivating. In the sixth form students have access to a good range of subjects at A and AS level but opportunities are missed to build on vocational courses taken by students at Key Stage 4. The school focuses well on teaching literacy and numeracy across the curriculum although the impact of this work varies between subjects. Arrangements for students to attend local colleges are developing and the school is responsive to local employment needs when planning vocational provision. The farm is a real benefit, offering students rare access to animal care and enriching subjects such as science. Developments in provision for gifted and talented students in the last year mean this is good although the impact has yet to be seen. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities which students are keen to attend. Specialist subjects such as dance and drama are well represented alongside sport

and the more unusual Young Farmers club. Participation is difficult for some students, however, because many take the bus to school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Form tutors, guidance coordinators and 'academy' directors provide effective support for students in mixed-age tutor groups. The students are well known and those who are vulnerable or at risk of exclusion are supported well. The Judith Centre provides good individual programmes for such students. These have helped reduce exclusions and reintroduce them to class as well as supporting crucial learning needs such as literacy. The school works well with outside agencies if students need additional help. Requirements for safeguarding students are in place and regularly reviewed. Work to improve attendance has made a limited impact on overall figures. The school is putting better systems in place to help students attend regularly, including not authorising holidays taken in term time. Academic guidance is good. Most students know their targets, and how to move on, although marking is not always thorough. The school provides good guidance on students' choice of courses at Key Stage 4 and when students leave the school. However, advice regarding options in the sixth form leads to some selecting inappropriate courses.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and her senior colleagues provide a clear focus on improving standards and supporting all students to achieve well and feel pride in themselves. They have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and improvement needs. Challenging targets for academic and personal development are used well to set goals and these filter down effectively into many areas of the school's work. However, in some cases, most evidently in the management and leadership of some subjects and the sixth form, too little attention is paid to evidence of students' achievement when deciding how provision needs to be improved or when measuring the impact of initiatives already taken. Resources are used well to support development priorities. Staff development is well planned and has led to improvements in teaching and has enabled the school to counter difficulties with recruitment. The school takes satisfactory steps to promote community cohesion with good features such as curriculum links with the local community especially through the performing arts. However, areas such as developing a strong international dimension are a work in progress. The governing body works hard and is effective in providing a balance of challenge and support for the headteacher and senior staff.

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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	3
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	3	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	
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	3	

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?	2	3
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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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**

14 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Brockhill Park Performing Arts College, Hythe, CT21 4HL

This letter is to give you the findings of the inspection and to thank the many of you who talked to us for your politeness and confidence during the discussions we had.

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- Our judgement is that the main school is good and the sixth form is satisfactory.
- You make good progress in the main school and do well in GCSEs and courses such as BTECs. In the sixth form, progress is slower but is satisfactory overall.
- Having performing arts status is a valuable part of both the main school and the sixth form and you do very well indeed in subjects such as dance and drama.
- Your behaviour and attitudes are good and most of you contribute well to school life. You and your parents and carers told us you feel well cared for and that the school helps you to lead healthy lives. When you need extra help, for example with learning, teaching assistants and teachers are good at helping you.
- Most of you enjoy school and attend regularly but some of you miss too much school time, including for holidays.
- The curriculum in the main school is good, particularly the range of courses you can choose from Year 9 onwards and the unusual opportunities you have to study subjects such as animal care in the farm on site. The curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory but does not offer as many possibilities as when you are younger or help all of you to build on what you have studied already.
- Teaching is good in the main school in most subjects although there are some variations in quality between subjects. Teaching in the sixth form is less effective overall in ensuring students make good progress over time.
- The new headteacher is working well with her colleagues to improve the school further. School leaders work well as a team but have yet to ensure that progress is equally good in all subjects and at all ages.

I have asked the headteacher to include the following into her development plans:

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- To work with those of you who miss too much school to encourage you to come in more often.
- To think carefully about which subjects or courses in the school need to be improved and check the impact on your learning after making the necessary changes.
- To widen the curriculum on offer in the sixth form and improve teaching so that students make good progress in all subjects.

Good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long

Her Majesty's Inspector