

Oathall Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126085
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	315425
Inspection dates	31 October –1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Stephen Long HMI

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	1290
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin McFarlin
Headteacher	Jill Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Appledore Gardens Lindfield Haywards Heath RH16 2AQ
Telephone number	01444 414001
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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 four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Oathall is a large school and has specialist status for science and the visual arts with a rural dimension. It has a Sportsmark and Artsmark, is a training school providing placements for trainee teachers and gained an International School Award this year. The college has its own farm, used both for college and community learning. The majority of students live in favourable socio-economic circumstances, but while a lower than average proportion are eligible for free school meals, some live in areas of deprivation. Most students are White British and relatively few speak English as an additional language. Students at the college have a wide ability range. Although it is broadly average overall, there is an increasing and above average proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, alongside an above average proportion who are high attaining.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Oathall provides a good quality of education. Progress since the last inspection, after initially being too slow, has quickened in the last year and the college has good capacity to improve further. In its own evaluation the college was overly modest about the improvements made in its overall effectiveness. The average attainment of students entering the college has fallen to a level broadly in line with that seen nationally. The students achieve well, reaching above average standards by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. There have been fluctuations in achievement, most noticeably falls in standards in English at Key Stage 3 and in overall GCSE results in 2006, but both were reversed in 2007. Leadership and management are good following improvements in the last year. The headteacher and her colleagues, acutely aware of the need to address the fall in standards in 2006, focused much more closely on students' achievement. Better monitoring procedures enabled underachievement to be tackled. All staff have been made more accountable for students' progress, although leaders and managers with academic responsibilities are at the forefront of this renewed drive. Those with pastoral roles, such as year leaders, play a strong role in students' personal development, however they are not sufficiently accountable for their academic progress. The college sets itself challenging targets and uses these well to provide stimulus for improvement. Specialist status has made a good impact in raising standards, developing strong links with the community and helping to meet the changing needs of the students. The college offers a good curriculum within which the farm is an outstanding feature, both for those students who spend much of their time there and for the college as a whole. It is fully embedded in the life of the college to the extent that some of the pigs have been named after members of staff! Care and guidance for students are good and this leads to good personal development and good behaviour. The college is committed to including all students, and their personal development is monitored carefully. Effective action is taken to support those who are vulnerable or at risk. The majority of parents are supportive of the work of the college and feel it does a good job. Most lessons are purposeful, ensure good progression in learning and meet students' varying needs. However, there are occasions where insufficient planning as to how students of different abilities, or who learn in different ways, will be supported and this leads to some students making slower progress because they are less engaged. A significant factor in the better achievement is the more rigorous use of assessment data to track students' progress and set targets. Regular assessment opportunities are evident, particularly at Key Stage 4, and guidance from teachers via marking and review days is good overall. Nevertheless, some marking and some opportunities for assessing work with students during lessons do not give them a clear enough understanding of what they need to do to meet their targets.

What the school should do to improve further

- Share the best practice in meeting the needs of every student in each lesson.
- Make sure all students know how to improve their work to meet their targets.
- Hold all leaders equally to account for the academic achievement of students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In Years 7 to 9 standards in mathematics and science are above the national average and have risen consistently. In contrast, standards in English, which had also been above average, followed a downward trend to 2006 when they were in line with those seen nationally. However, better

tracking of students' progress and focused intervention when there are concerns have seen marked improvement in English so that standards are now above average again and on a rising trend. Achievement in other subjects is good and standards are above average. The most recent GCSE results show a significant improvement following the dip in 2006 and are above average. As with the younger students, the college now makes much better use of assessment information to check students' progress towards their targets. Achievement is good overall with particular improvement in the progress of more able students and a narrowing in the variations in achievement in different subjects that were evident in 2006. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially with multiple needs, make good and sometimes outstanding progress. Progress towards demanding specialist college targets has been slow but is now much improved. The college has met targets in relation to its rural dimension and narrowly missed those in art and science. However, better achievement means the college is on track to meet its targets in 2008

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most students enjoy their learning, as reflected in their good attendance. They develop well both morally and socially, the majority having good relationships with each other and with their teachers. Most behave very well and bullying is rare; however a small number of parents have concerns about students' behaviour. The students make a good contribution to the college and its community. For example the student council has been involved in writing the anti-bullying policy and a sub-committee gained a national award for its work to improve behaviour. The students use opportunities such as tutor groups and personal, social and health education lessons to discuss important personal, cultural and religious issues and reflect thoughtfully upon them in most cases. Most students say they feel safe in college and know who to turn to if they need help. Younger students are well supported by their older peers, some of whom act as mentors. Students have a good understanding of the need to lead healthy lives by eating well and through their willing participation in sporting activities. The college farm allows all the students to develop a good understanding of agricultural, commercial and environmental issues as well as animal welfare. This augments their good progress in other areas of learning, preparing them well for life beyond college.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and have improved through staff development, including coaching. Most lessons are well paced and contain interesting activities so that students concentrate well and enjoy learning. Assessment information is used effectively in most cases to match lesson content to students' varying needs. However, a minority of lessons make insufficient provision for students' varied attainment or preferred ways of learning, and focus on all students completing the same tasks. In these circumstances, progress is slower because some students are less engaged in learning and hence less motivated. Students know their target levels and grades for the end of their current key stage. Many teachers involve students fully, for example through discussion, in deciding what to do to achieve their targets. While specialist college subjects such as art are leading a widening of this good practice across the college, this is not consistently the case in all lessons. As a result, students do not always take enough responsibility for moving their learning forward. Systems for tracking students' progress

over time have improved in the last two years, aiding accurate identification of underachievement and more focused teaching. This work is well developed at Key Stage 4, with regular assessments, but less so at Key Stage 3 where checks on short-term progress are less frequent and short-term targets less clear. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support in lessons and withdrawal groups. Additional adults are deployed effectively and the progress of these students is monitored carefully.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Rising standards testify to the college's sharper focus on meeting students' individual needs. Curriculum development is monitored carefully, although there is further to go to ensure that curriculum content is finely adapted in all subjects and teaching situations. Good links with primary schools enable effective transition into Year 7, where good practice in tailoring the curriculum to meet needs is to be found. Many subjects make outstanding use of the farm to support learning, with strong evidence, for example in science, of links to agriculture. The farm provides particularly well for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for some disaffected students at risk of exclusion. The international dimension is very good; it includes links with schools abroad and continued language study for most students at Key Stage 4. The college is actively involved with community projects to extend students' learning. Specialist subjects play a leading role in these activities, typified by an exhibition of students' artwork at a local botanical garden and art classes for senior citizens. The range of vocational and academic options, some using local partners, has improved in the last two years and provides very well for students of all abilities in Years 10 and 11. Good provision for more able students now includes masterclasses and an AS level course. Limited space and facilities restrict physical education provision and some cramped classrooms also constrain activities. A wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities strengthens learners' experience and enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The college has robust procedures to ensure the health and safety of students, and the necessary child protection measures are in place. Good support for students' personal and academic development involves regular reviews of behaviour and attitudes as well as progress in each subject. Strong features of provision include discussions with group tutors leading to targets being set for behavioural areas such as organisation of studies as well as checking progress toward subject targets. This very good guidance results in the good behaviour and achievement seen from most students. On the few occasions when bullying occurs, it is dealt with effectively; however parents/carers and victims are not always adequately informed of the actions taken to deal with the perpetrators. Vulnerable students and those who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour receive good support. College staff, such as the 'family and child support worker', collaborate effectively with outside agencies like social services to help such students, adapting their work well on an individual basis. Exclusions are low and the college has considerable success in encouraging the attendance of students who find it difficult to come in regularly. Teachers mark students' work regularly. Some marking gives very good guidance for improvement but this is not consistent. Review days ensure that parents have good opportunities to discuss their children's achievement. Careers guidance is a strength.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

In the last two years the headteacher and senior colleagues, working well as a team, have strengthened the college's focus on achievement and sharpened the means to hold staff to account for the impact of their work on students' progress. To achieve this, monitoring and evaluation have improved. They now involve the collection of a good range of evidence and are largely accurate, enabling the college to identify areas requiring improvement. These usefully underpin its development plans, within which most success criteria are measurable. Monitoring and evaluation are used well to target staff development and support the exploration of new approaches to teaching and learning. Leadership and management of the developing aspects of the curriculum such as specialist status are good. The quality of middle management is good. Subject leaders analyse assessment data effectively, intervening when students underachieve, and are very aware of the overall targets toward which their subjects are working. Their use of assessment data to identify and improve weaker aspects of provision is good overall and improving but inconsistent between different subjects and less effective at Key Stage 3, where less detailed data is available. Those in pastoral roles, such as year leaders, make a good contribution to students' personal development and well-being. They are closely involved in monitoring the academic progress of individual students and in intervening if it is too slow. However, they are not involved enough in monitoring the academic progress of groups of students or accountable enough for the students' academic achievement. Governors gather a good range of evidence and challenge the college well. They too are now much more focused on monitoring students' achievement and are developing strong links with subjects to enable them to do this in even more detail.

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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?	2
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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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?	2
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?	2
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
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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
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

- 2 November 2007 Dear Students Inspection of Oathall Community College, Haywards Heath, RH16 2AQ This letter is to give you the outcomes of the recent inspection and to thank you for your participation, especially the many of you who took the time to talk to us. Oathall is a good college and helps you to make good progress. The staff work well as a team and monitor the college carefully to see where improvements could be made. For example, following lower than expected GCSE results in 2006, students' progress and the quality of teaching were checked more carefully and improvements made so that standards were much better in this year's examinations. Subject leaders check your academic progress carefully. Other school leaders, such as year leaders, monitor the personal and academic development of individual students well but are not involved enough in checking how different groups of students are getting on so they can tackle it if it is too slow. The college takes good care of you and supports you in leading safe and healthy lives. Most students behave well and contribute to the college. There is little bullying and when it does occur it is effectively dealt with, although some of you told us that students who are bullied are not always sure what action the college has taken. Most of you enjoy college and attendance is high. The majority of lessons are good and make learning interesting. However, some do not help you approach learning in different ways, for example for students of differing ability in the same class. You have challenging targets and many teachers give good feedback about how to reach them. Many involve you in the process of deciding how to move your work on although this is not always the case. Guidance for options and career choices is very good. The college provides a good curriculum. Its specialist status for science, art and the rural dimension is developing well and making a big impact. Having an on-site farm offers an outstanding opportunity for all of you to learn about agriculture and the environment and for some to pursue land-based studies in great depth. Although Oathall is a good college we have asked the headteacher to include the following points in future improvements:
 - Make sure all lessons meet the needs of each student as fully as the best lessons.
 - Make the most of all opportunities to involve students in deciding how to improve their work to meet their targets.
 - Make monitoring the academic progress of different groups of students a key part of the work of all school leaders. Good luck for the future Stephen Long Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

2 November 2007

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Good luck for the future
Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector