

Rochester Independent College

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	8876004
Unique Reference Number	119006
Inspection number	321014
Inspection dates	10-11 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Thirkell

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the college

Rochester Independent College was established on its current site in 1984 as a tutorial college. It provides education for 163 boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 18. Provision for younger students, of whom there are currently 69, has expanded considerably in recent years. The majority of students attend on a daily basis, but there are thirty eight boarders, including a number of overseas students. The college aims to provide *'a fresh alternative to traditional independent education in a lively, supportive and informal atmosphere'* where students *'achieve examination success'*. Two students have statements of special educational need. The boarding provision was last inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in December 2006. This is the college's first published inspection report by Ofsted.

Evaluation of the college

Rochester Independent College is successful in meeting its aims and most students are pleased to be at the college. The quality of education provided is outstanding. Students of all abilities, including those who have experienced difficulties with education previously, make outstanding progress. The good examination results achieved by students at both GCSE and A levels reflect their progress and the effective structures of support employed by the college. Students are well cared for and the college uses a range of opportunities to effectively raise their self-esteem and self-confidence. Feedback from the vast majority of parents acknowledges the support that the college has provided for their children. The college meets nearly all the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good with a number of outstanding features. It successfully meets the needs of students of all ages and abilities through providing an appropriately wide range of learning experiences, including for the small minority who have statements of special educational need. It successfully supports the vast majority of students to learn and make progress.

The curriculum is supported by an appropriate range of documentation. The curriculum policy is clear and accessible and effectively reflects the aims and ethos of the college. Schemes of work are in place for all subjects, although the college is clear that these are still in a process of further development. The best schemes of

work are of high quality. The curriculum for students below the age of 16 reflects the guidance of the National Curriculum, but in addition, they have the opportunity of studying subjects such as media, music, German, Spanish and several art and design based subjects. Students studying A level courses have the choice of a wide range of subjects. The college works hard to tailor courses to meet individual students' requirements and needs. Questions relating to the choice of courses available raised by a minority of older students were not upheld by inspection.

A suitable programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) is provided for students below the age of 16. Planning for PSHE is detailed and contains appropriate topics relating to citizenship. Nevertheless, despite these strengths, aspects of the organisation of PSHE are sometimes not well matched to the short periods of time allotted to the subject each day. The college is currently reviewing the provision of time for PSHE. Careers education is a component of PSHE and is further supported by the effective tutor system. Students have a work experience in Year 10.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding and teachers plan lessons that meet students' needs exceptionally well. Working relationships are very good and teachers and students enjoy each other's company. Teachers and students work within an atmosphere of mutual understanding, respect and consideration, with lessons taking place within a calm and very orderly atmosphere. Classes are small and teachers quickly 'tune in' to the learning needs of their students, enabling them to set tasks that provide a high level of interest and challenge. Many of the students have experienced difficulties in their previous education and teachers are aware of the need to foster students' self-esteem and confidence. They use praise well and ensure their lessons provide regular opportunities that enable students to achieve and feel good about what they do. These factors lay a firm foundation for effective learning and students rapidly settle in; one student commented 'It's like being at home in many ways.'

Teachers' subject knowledge is good; they explain points clearly and challenge students to think deeply. The quality of discussion and questioning during lessons is outstanding. Lessons pass briskly and teachers do not allow individual students to 'hide', directing their questions to all present. Interesting resources often enliven learning and teachers include a variety of activities in their planning so that all students are engaged. For example, during an English lesson, Year 9 students were learning about Jack the Ripper. They were fascinated to read pen portraits of the victims, speculate on the identity of the Ripper and see reproductions of the contemporary police drawings and diagrams.

The marking of students' work is regular and detailed. Individual progress is carefully monitored and teachers give very clear guidance on exactly what students need to do to improve. Written feedback provides sharp, measurable targets and is supplemented by regular verbal feedback to each student. This helps most to make outstanding progress in their work.

The school has good systems for assessing students' progress and attainment. In Key Stage 3, the school uses regular in-house testing and National Curriculum criteria to gauge the level at which students are working. At Key Stages 4 and 5, the college uses end of unit tests and assesses students' work relative to the examination criteria. The tutor system makes a significant contribution to students' educational guidance and underpins their rapid progress. Older students in Years 11, 12 and 13 have a formal meeting with senior teachers at least once a fortnight and all parents are kept fully up to date with their children's progress through very regular letters and emails. Tutors are the main point of contact for younger students and they keep a very close eye on their progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is outstanding. The development of students' self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence are central to the college aims. The majority of students are effectively supported in these aspects of their development and enjoy attending the college. Development in this respect is particularly notable amongst those students who have previously experienced difficulties in their education. Attendance is good. The positive relationships between staff and students play a key role in supporting strategies aimed at encouraging students to become committed to their own improvement. These develop skills that support students' future economic well-being.

Students develop a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong and discussion of moral issues is a recurring theme in lessons. This development is supported through the PSHE programme for younger students and through the effective tutor system. It is supported by frank and mature discussion in classes across the curriculum and on occasions supported by visitors, such as local police officers. Students develop an understanding of public institutions in England and the wider world through citizenship and other aspects of the curriculum. Behaviour is outstanding and classes are conducted in a mature learning environment. Students make a positive contribution through organising events and supporting a range of charities, such as the Woodland Trust. Established students act as 'buddies' to new students joining the college. Their appreciation of other cultures reflects the wide range of the curriculum and the opportunity for discussion provided in lessons, supported by the high quality of relationships between staff and students. The development of tolerance and harmony was effectively developed in an English lesson through the thoughtful discussion of issues raised by reading 'To Kill a Mockingbird'.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is outstanding. The college takes very good care of its students and places a strong emphasis on the health and safety of students, staff and visitors. This high standard of care contributes well to students' outstanding personal development and is underpinned by a comprehensive

range of policies and procedures that cover all the required regulations. Students feel confident that they will be well looked after if there is any sort of mishap.

Routine arrangements for day-to-day health and safety and child protection are in place. The college is sited on a busy road and students understand how to behave responsibly in and around the premises. Policies are reviewed regularly and accurate records are kept, for example, of attendance and admissions. Risk assessments, including the fire risk assessment, are exceptionally thorough and fire procedures are in place, although the college has still to make up-to-date checks on portable electrical equipment. Following the recent appointment of a qualified nurse, first aid provision is particularly good and there are ample staff qualified in first aid. The college meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 because it has a suitable three year plan in place.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The college fulfills its responsibilities in ensuring that all staff are appropriately checked prior to taking up their appointments. Records of the checks are maintained in the prescribed manner in a single central record.

College's premises and accommodation

The college premises and accommodation are good. Most buildings in the college grounds are listed by English Heritage. They provide for most aspects of the curriculum, although younger students attend a local sports centre for games each week to augment the college's own facilities. The college has worked hard to ensure that buildings are suitable to support the education of students of all ages whilst maintaining their historic heritage. Different age groups of students are mainly educated in distinct parts of the premises, although specialist teaching accommodation for subjects such as art and science is used by all groups. The college is well maintained and cleaned by its own maintenance staff. It meets all legal requirements relating to buildings and accommodation. Risk assessments are thorough and detailed in relation to accommodation and the college has received a recent visit from the local fire service.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The college provides parents and prospective parents with all the required information. The college website, designed originally by one of the college's own students, provides detailed information that considerably exceeds the requirements. It is, in a number of respects, a model of good practice in that it effectively reflects the aims and ethos of the college.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints policy fully meets the requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The college meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The college does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for students' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- complete checks of portable electrical equipment (paragraph 3(4)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the college might wish to consider the following points for development:

- complete the development of all schemes of work to provide more effectively for younger students
- complete the reorganisation of time for PSHE to provide a better match between curriculum goals and allotted time.

School details

Name of college	Rochester Independent College		
DCSF number	8876004		
Unique reference number	119006		
Type of college	Secondary (formerly tutorial)		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1984		
Age range of students	11-19		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 97	Girls: 66	Total: 163
Number of boarders	Boys: 26	Girls: 12	Total: 38
Number of students with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 9450 - 12750		
Annual fees (boarders)	£ 21750		
Address of school	Star Hill Rochester Kent ME1 1XF		
Telephone number	01634828115		
Fax number	01634405667		
Email address	admissions@rochester-college.org		
Principals	Mr Brian Pain, Pauline Bailey, Alistair Brownlow		
Proprietors	Mr Brian Pain, Pauline Bailey, Alistair Brownlow		
Reporting inspector	Michael Thirkell		
Dates of inspection	10-11 January 2008		