

Garth Hill College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110069
Local Authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	337434
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Scott 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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1316
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	139
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr John Baildam
Headteacher	Mr Keith Grainger
Date of previous school inspection	0 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 38 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at its development plan, minutes of meetings, policy documents, analysis of student progress and attainment and other documentation supporting the school's operation.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at:

- teaching and learning and the progress made by students in lessons
- the impact of the specialism across the school
- the sixth form provision.

Information about the school

Garth Hill College is a larger than average specialist technology college with a growing sixth form. The senior leadership team has changed extensively over recent years and the head teacher has been in post for two years. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is lower than the national average as is the number of students with statements of special educational need and learners known to be eligible for free school meals. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average.

The school is planning to move to a brand new building on the same site in September 2010.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

Garth Hill College is a successful college providing students with a good education. A committed team of staff understand and contribute to the ambitious vision that is driving improvement. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the college's many strengths and of its areas for development. Self-evaluation processes are effective and are developing well at all levels in the school. Strong leadership and trust, as well as students' outstanding behaviour, contribute very well to the positive and cooperative culture of learning. Students demonstrate a great deal of empathy for others. They act considerately and are very willing to contribute to the school and wider community. Their mature attitudes in lessons contribute much to the good progress they make. This is a college that has made rapid and sustained progress since its last inspection and has a clear direction with the needs of students central to its development.

Overall the quality of teaching is satisfactory and improving. School leaders accurately assess the quality of lessons and take decisive and timely action to ensure the continuing improvement of classroom practice. When good or outstanding lessons were seen by inspectors, these were characterised by focussed teaching with a clear context and constructive use of assessment to allow more independent reflection by learners. This good and outstanding practice, whilst developing well, is not yet fully embedded across the college. The college has extensive and accurate tracking systems used to good effect in setting targets, identifying intervention groups and motivating students. However, the use of assessment to support learning and fully challenge students is not yet consistent in all lessons.

The standards reached by students continue to improve in all year groups and in the sixth form. Specialist subjects contribute well to the overall picture of attainment with science, mathematics and design and technology demonstrating annual improvements over recent years. Progress made by all students has accelerated and is now good.

The school has developed a range of partnerships through its specialist college programme, which are promoting learning in Garth Hill and contributing well to the learning of students in other institutions. These partnership arrangements are assisting in developing these schools' understanding of learning and so contribute to the continuous professional development of local teachers.

The sixth form is now an integral part of the school with an increasingly inclusive approach. It has improved rapidly since the previous inspection and provision is now good. The curriculum meets the needs of learners effectively. Students are clear about progression routes and explained to inspectors the range of support provided to enable more learners to consider post 16 opportunities. Outcomes in the sixth form are now

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satisfactory.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good. The school knows its strengths and areas for development well. The policies and strategies for improvement are being analysed with increasing sophistication but this is not yet systematic enough to assess fully the impact on all stakeholders, particularly on outcomes for learners.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching further so that the vast majority of lessons are good or better, building on the existing outstanding practice to ensure;
 - lessons are interesting and motivating with relevant contexts to learning
 - constructive and regular feedback is given to students
 - effective use of assessment to support learning
 - planning has clear and appropriate levels of challenge for all learners.
- Analyse more systematically the impact of interventions and policies, coordinating centrally the wide range of management information in order to maximise the outcomes for learners and other stakeholders.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Overall students make good progress in lessons and achieve well. They are very cooperative and eager to learn. Students respond positively to well planned lessons and high quality feedback from teachers. They are able to work increasingly independently and are eager to contribute to the school and wider community. The results that students achieve in GCSE and other examinations such as BTEC are broadly average and rising. There are no major differences in rates of progress between groups of students. Results in science and mathematics are above the national average.

Students' outstanding attitudes and behaviour, observed by inspectors, contributes greatly to the positive ethos for learning in classrooms. When lessons were not as interesting, challenging or poorly planned, these attitudes enabled progress to be maintained. Students were generally very well behaved around the building and cooperated with the duty staff, demonstrating a pride in the school and high social awareness and responsibility.

Students develop well the skills needed in the workplace. Attendance is good. Students have a clear understanding about making healthy choices in life and know about how they can keep themselves safe. They are able to manage the risks they face in their lives with a mature approach. Assemblies support students in their reflection of wider issues and they develop a clear sense of morality. There are more limited opportunities currently for cultural development. Art work is used well to provoke thought but is limited in its use around the site. Opportunities to develop a wider understanding of other faiths and cultures are sometimes missed.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and has improved through a clear commitment from staff. The leadership of teaching and learning is good and is a key strand in the school's development plan. Teachers do not always make the best use of assessment to support learning. Where it is used well, as observed in classrooms by inspectors, students are more able to understand the learning process and to work independently. This resulted in rapid progress and greater engagement and enjoyment of lessons. Relationships observed in classrooms between students and staff were very positive and demonstrated the mutual respect all members of the community have for each other, which is a strong part of the ethos of the school. This helped some less dynamic lessons to sustain at least satisfactory progress. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and relationships between staff and students are productive and built on trust. Lessons are sometimes not as challenging and lack pace and a relevant context. Students however generally compensate for this and work sufficiently hard to make at least satisfactory progress.

The curriculum is well matched to students' needs and aspirations and has developed extensively with the college's specialist status. A wider range of subjects and courses is now available to students in Key Stage 4. The use of data to identify and support individual students is becoming increasingly effective. The college has attained the Quality in Study Support Mark and offers a wide range of extra curricular activities.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Good systems for target setting and tracking of student progress are in place. They are used well to reduce the risk of students underperforming and to identify groups for particular interventions. Whilst this data is used effectively by leaders to monitor progress, it is not used consistently in the classroom to support learning. During the inspection, self-assessment in some classrooms was used to good effect in engaging students in understanding the learning process, but this was not consistent across the college. Individual students were not always clear about what they needed to focus on to make steps forward in their learning.

The school has a caring ethos that all students value. Support for careers and study routes as well as transition is strong. Students new to the school feel at home and are made very welcome.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team has established a clear and ambitious vision for the future of the college. The staff understand what the college needs to do and demonstrate a cohesive commitment to achieving improved outcomes for students. Leaders at all levels identify underperformance and have clear priorities to ensure achievement is good and rising.

Good safeguarding procedures and policies are in place. Staff at all levels are aware of the duty of care they hold and work diligently to ensure the safety of all students. The college has an inclusive approach and is working hard to ensure equality of opportunity is well promoted.

Governors are committed, hard working and dedicated to improving outcomes for students. They challenge the school and are developing their monitoring skills effectively. The analysis of the impact of policies on learners' achievements is not always approached systematically and so opportunities are missed for further refinement of provision. Governors have ensured that through times of great strain for the school a resolute and stable platform has enabled it to move forward.

A good relationship now exists between the school and parents and carers due to considerable effort from the school. Focus groups and surveys have contributed to the positive relationships, and electronic communication is used increasingly effectively. The school competently addresses the concerns of parents and the vast majority are happy with how the school responds when issues arise.

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The school has made good progress on the promotion of community cohesion based on an analysis of its context and priorities. With very strong local links, the college is now developing further its national and international links.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students studying in the sixth form are generally very grateful for the opportunity to continue their education at Garth Hill. They express positive views about the support and care staff provide as well as the improved curriculum and opportunities to play an active part in school life with, for example, the school council and charity work.

Students are positive and demonstrate a very mature attitude both socially and to their studies. The sixth form has improved rapidly since the last inspection with all of the issues highlighted showing a great deal of improvement. Students make satisfactory progress overall and this is improving.

The leadership of the sixth form has improved and the college is now an effective and coordinated 11-19 institute. The provision of the sixth form is similar to that of the main school and outcomes for students are satisfactory.

Major changes to the curriculum mean that it is much more appropriate in matching the needs of learners. There are good partnership arrangements between the school and other institutes to enable students to study a wider range of courses than those on offer at Garth Hill alone. Attainment is now satisfactory and rising.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

About one third of parents and carers returned questionnaires to the inspection team. The views expressed about the college were generally supportive of the school, with approximately 90% of responses to most questions being positive. Parents were very happy about their child's progress and enjoyment of school. A few parents expressed concerns about communication with the school and the extent to which it helps them to become involved and takes into account their suggestions. Almost all parents said they felt the school keeps students safe and just under 95% of parents felt happy with the overall experience of their child at the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Garth Hill College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 439 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1316 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	135	31	268	61	24	5	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	138	31	283	64	3	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	115	26	253	58	15	3	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	102	23	254	58	27	6	2	0
The teaching is good at this school	87	20	290	66	20	5	3	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	86	20	263	60	32	7	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	73	17	270	62	41	9	7	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	99	23	275	63	12	3	2	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	96	22	265	60	26	6	4	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	129	29	228	52	31	7	6	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	76	17	244	56	42	10	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	167	38	223	51	12	3	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	145	33	249	57	17	4	5	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



18 September 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Garth Hill College, Bracknell, RG12 2JH

Following the inspection of your college, we would like to thank you for making us feel welcome and for contributing so well to the inspection in meetings, in lessons, through the questionnaire, and when we met you in the corridors.

We were most impressed with your behaviour and your mature and positive approach to learning. This was commendable and you are great ambassadors for your college and for young people everywhere.

We think Garth Hill College is a good college. Things have been improving well over the last few years and you now make good progress. You have a number of good and outstanding teachers that make lessons interesting and support you well in getting you to understand the next stages in your learning. This doesn't always happen, however, and we have asked that more lessons should be of this quality. You will need to continue to cooperate with your teachers and rise to the increased challenge in lessons in order to make even better progress.

The curriculum as well as the support you get generally from the college is good. We have asked the college to make sure it analyses its work even more carefully to ensure that you all continue to be well supported in your learning and make the best progress possible.

You are rightly proud of your college and I am sure you are looking forward to the new buildings. I wish you well and hope you remember the key to your success is the positive relationships you have with your teachers.

Yours Sincerely

Paul Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector

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