

Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114606
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	338417
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Meena Wood 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	1740
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs J Barnard-Langston
Headteacher	Ms J Felkin
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2007
School address	Neville Avenue Hove East Sussex BN3 7BW
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 57 lessons, observed 48 teachers, and held meetings with the chair of governors, leaders and managers, teaching staff, and students. They observed the school's work in Years 7'13, spent the majority of the time in lessons, and carried out a significant number of joint observations of lessons and 'learning walks' with the school's senior managers. They carefully scrutinised the school development plan and departmental reviews, a range of school policies, local authority reviews, governing body minutes, internal teaching and learning observations, students' work, 503 parental questionnaires, 167 pupil questionnaires and 36 staff questionnaires.

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

- whether teaching and assessment practice are sufficiently tailored to students' abilities, levels and prior attainment
- GCSE attainment and the progress of students between Years 7 and 11
- the learning and progress and behaviour of individual students in lessons
- whether the curriculum and its specialist status meet students' needs and help raise achievement
- the quality of academic guidance
- A level and level 3 attainment and progress in the sixth form since the last inspection and development of students' independent learning skills
- the capacity of leaders and managers to make sustained improvements.

Information about the school

Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form College has specialist status in performing arts, mathematics, information and communication technology and vocational education. It is a Leading Edge school. The school shares a very small proportion of joint sixth form provision with the neighbouring Hove Park School.

The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who have statements of special educational needs is within national averages. Most of these students have moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or dyslexia, while a very small number have profound and complex learning difficulties. The majority of the school's students are from White British backgrounds and a small minority are from Asian and European groups. The number of pupils who speak languages other than English as their first language is very low. The main heritage languages are Pashto, Korean, Portuguese and Latvian. A low proportion of students are in receipt of free school meals.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Blatchington Mill School is a satisfactory school that has a good capacity to improve, as demonstrated by the great strengths evident in Years 7 to 11, and this has resulted in good outcomes, personal development and well-being for these students. However, the school has not been effective in raising standards and outcomes for students in the sixth form, since the last inspection. Therefore, the sixth form's overall effectiveness is judged as inadequate.

Since the arrival of the current headteacher two years ago, the school has successfully shifted the focus of the rigorous monitoring of teaching to students' learning and has encouraged the sharing of good and excellent practice across Years 7 to 11. This has led to an increased emphasis on a variety of teaching styles that support students' diverse learning needs across the school, one of the two areas identified for improvement in the last inspection. All students, including those in the sixth form, take pride in their school, are well-motivated and have a positive attitude to learning.

The academic and vocational curriculum has a strong emphasis on a wide range of courses, which is enhanced by enjoyable extra-curricular performing arts and cultural activities, thus ensuring students develop into well-rounded individuals. As a result of good teaching and assessment, most students make good levels of progress and attain above average outcomes in GCSE and other assessments at the end of Key Stage 4. In the majority of lessons, where teaching and assessment activities are well-structured in line with students' abilities, they develop independent learning skills and good understanding through collaborative activities. In a minority of lessons, however, teachers' planning does not take the full range of students' prior attainment into account and teachers do not always check the knowledge and skills students are acquiring. The school is fully aware of its strengths and the areas where it needs to improve and has prioritised greater consistency in the quality of feedback and marking on students' written work, so that all students know precisely what they need to do to improve against their targets.

The headteacher and her senior team have provided strong leadership in engaging external partnerships and developing an ethos of continuous improvements through a keen focus on self-evaluation. The school's engagement and communications with its parents and carers are outstanding. The parent of a Year 11 student reported: 'The school gave both my sons a fantastic all-round education, they achieved well and I value the effort of all staff in making the school a great school.'

Leadership and management of the sixth form are inadequate. The strategy in place at the time of the last inspection of separate sixth form autonomy and ethos has failed to

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demonstrate improvements in the second identified area of development, namely raising standards and encouraging more independent learning. In the last year, as a result of inadequate student outcomes, senior managers and governors have started to address weaknesses in the sixth form curriculum, the quality of its teaching, monitoring procedures and practice. However, at the time of the inspection, the impact of the school's actions was not evident.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' standards and outcomes in the sixth form by September 2010 through:
 - an appropriate curriculum that matches all students' aspirations and levels
 - using prior attainment data on students in planning lesson activities and tasks and ensuring sufficient challenge and support to accelerate their progress and learning
 - informing students of how to improve on their targets through more focused guidance
 - ensuring greater integration and accountability of the leadership and management of the sixth form into the main school
 - more rigorous monitoring of procedures and practice by senior managers.
- Develop greater consistency in assessment and teaching in Years 7'11 by September 2010 through
 - more effective detailed marking and feedback to students on how to improve
 - checking the knowledge and skills that students are acquiring during lessons and using this information to continuously review the suitability of teaching activities.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The number of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C is above the national average, with a minor dip in 2009. However, the school's own data suggest further improvements are likely for current Year 11 students both in terms of attainment and progress. The school is quick to respond to in-school variations in attainment across subjects and has, in the last year, raised standards in English language and history. The standards of work observed by inspectors in lessons and in students' books confirmed this improvement. However, students' literacy skills and presentation of their work varied from subject to subject. In a number of lessons, students are responsive to well-structured paired or group tasks, actively contribute to discussions and visibly enjoy their work. Students with dyslexia and individual students with profound and complex learning difficulties receive especially well-targeted support and most make good progress.

Students report that the school is a safe environment. They are aware of healthy

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lifestyles, and a significant number of students take advantage of school lunches. Participation in sporting activities is largely satisfactory. The school strongly emphasises the dangers of bullying and harassment and this leads to students having a good sense of how to behave and what is morally acceptable. Students are proactively involved in shaping school activities, through for instance, the five-rule school behaviour code, student governors and contributing to staff recruitment processes and feedback on lessons.

Students are supportive of one another in the main school but there is little opportunity for them to interact with sixth form students. The school has a strong focus on culturally themed assemblies and projects that help students' effectiveness with risk-taking and develop citizenship skills through, for instance, debates with local councillors. These all contribute to students' good social, cultural and spiritual awareness. Students' punctuality and attendance are good and they display the responsible attitudes and aptitudes they need to equip them for further education and the world of work.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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?

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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In the best lessons observed by inspectors, teachers have strong subject knowledge and use this to inspire learning effectively. In a Spanish lesson, high expectations, along with good use of peer-assessment by the teacher, enabled students to make good progress and to enjoy using the target language. In most subjects, teachers plan activities and tasks in line with students' abilities and levels, thus encouraging them to work purposefully, and with good outcomes. In an outstanding lesson, all students, including those with learning difficulties, used the interactive whiteboard imaginatively to demonstrate the practical application of mathematical concepts, while the teacher and the teaching assistants successfully checked their understanding.

Most teachers use assessment descriptors during tasks, to ensure that students know what level and grade they are working at and what they need to do to improve. In a small minority of lessons, too much teacher input and whole-class activities for long periods of time means that students' learning and progress are not checked effectively and there is insufficient challenge for more-able students. Although marking of some students' work is helpfully detailed, it is not of consistent quality across all subject areas. Real-time progress and attainment reports are accessed through the school's portal. A number of students demonstrated its use to inspectors and indicated their high levels of satisfaction with this reporting system. Students receive good academic guidance on their next steps in Years 8 and 9 and satisfactory guidance in Year 11 for post-16 progression. This area is being further developed in line with the 14'19 curriculum, to which the school is very committed. Strong multi-agency working with pastoral staff effectively engages vulnerable students with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties.

The 11'16 school curriculum meets most students' needs through a developing range of academic and vocational qualifications. A responsive programme of NVQ qualifications is in place for 14'16 year olds at the neighbouring colleges and an effective foundation level Entry to Employment (E2E) programme is located in the school for those students at risk of dropping out of education at 16. The Diploma in Creative Media has further consolidated the school's links with local employers and businesses.

The school's specialist performing arts status has led to links with primary schools for drama, and the school's own Windmill Theatre provides good opportunities for students to showcase their talents within the local community.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has been in post for two years, and is a strongly motivated and aspirational leader. With the support of her senior managers, she has worked hard to transform the learning culture of the main school. This focus has meant that the leadership team has only recently started to address weaknesses that have arisen from the current sixth form structure. A senior management review is now moving towards greater integration of sixth form students within the main school, minimising the current variance in monitoring procedures and practice and ensuring that all students make the progress of which they are capable. The school has prioritised actions that accurately address the weaknesses identified by inspectors.

A strong focus on self-evaluation permeates management culture, and middle managers are required to evaluate their areas of learning through detailed analyses of performance data, lesson observations, work samples and discussions with students. These reports inform the school's own self-evaluation and accurately identify weaknesses and strengths in provision. Moreover, the school's internal lesson observations this year focus much more on the engagement of students in their learning. The school has prioritised the moderation of the observation process for its middle leaders, and lead professionals work effectively with staff on sharing good practice in teaching and tutoring.

Support provided by the governors is good but the governing body's challenge of the school on its sixth form has not been sufficiently timely. Safeguarding procedures are highly robust. Although the school rigorously monitors students' outcomes at individual level, it is now prioritising refining group analyses in line with its equalities policy. A review of Key Stage 4 advice and guidance is also intended in relation to gender stereotyping. Staff and governors ensure that discrimination in any form is not tolerated. However, access to sporting activities is limited for sixth form students and their outcomes are significantly lower than those in the main school.

The school uses its Leading Edge Status effectively to share professional expertise in teaching, 14'19 and specialist ICT developments and work-related learning with other schools. This emphasis on an outward-facing learning community extends to the school's productive local partnerships with schools, universities and other organisations, and effectively promotes community cohesion within and beyond the school.

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Leadership and management of the sixth form are inadequate as self-evaluation has not identified the full extent of its weaknesses and the senior leader has not taken timely action to address these in collaboration with other senior leaders. An insufficiently rigorous focus on monitoring of performance data, staff and students' attendance, and quality of teaching has had a negative impact on students' learning experiences and outcomes. In addition, tracking and monitoring arrangements of the small number of students from both schools attending the joint provision are not robust.

Outcomes for sixth form students are inadequate. A-level and vocational examinations standards are below the national average. AS level standards are significantly below national averages. National published data over three years indicate that students entering the sixth form with broadly average levels of GCSE attainment are not helped to make the progress they should, relative to their starting points. Although learning and progress are satisfactory in some lessons, a significant minority of students do not make the progress they should across all subjects, especially in business studies. Nevertheless, a number of students in lessons demonstrated a sense of self-direction and ambition.

Induction to the sixth form does not include an adequate assessment of students' levels of language and numeracy and students are not helped to acquire the necessary skills of critical thinking and independent learning. As a result, too many students lack the maturity of thought, along with the oral and the writing skills that would enable them to be more successful in higher-level examinations. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory, but inspectors observed a disproportionate level of inadequate teaching and assessment in Year 12 lessons, relative to the rest of the school.

Just under one third of the students on two-year A-level courses do not continue after the first year, because they have been recruited to courses that are inappropriate for them. One of the school's priority actions is to provide levels of qualifications that best serve all its students, especially the significant minority that enter with low levels of GCSE attainment and are unable to successfully make the transition to level 3 courses.

Academic guidance is unsatisfactory. Students have the opportunity to review their personal learning targets and receive feedback on their personal progress; however, this varies greatly in quality and lacks the rigour of practice observed in the main school.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	4
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	4
The quality of provision in the sixth form	4
Leadership and management of the sixth form	4

Views of parents and carers

The majority of parents and carers, who returned inspection questionnaires, of students in Years 7'11 report favourably on the extent of their involvement in school life, their high levels of satisfaction with the school, the good levels of students' healthy lifestyles, the good pastoral support received by their children and excellent links with the school. A significant number of comments were received from parents who expressed a desire for more homework, more face-to-face contact with tutors, and information on their children's progress, especially where they do not or cannot access the school portal.

The majority of comments received by parents of sixth form students were negative as they expressed concerns at the quality of teaching, academic guidance, the cover teaching arrangements for absent staff and the impact that this had on their children's learning. Inspectors did find sufficient evidence to support these concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Blatchington Mill 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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 503 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1740 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	171	34	283	56	42	8	2	0
The school keeps my child safe	222	44	259	51	12	2	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	197	39	258	51	38	8	5	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	180	36	265	53	39	8	6	1
The teaching is good at this school	172	34	285	57	14	3	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	153	30	277	55	54	11	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	121	24	303	60	51	10	5	1
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)	168	33	262	52	22	4	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	170	34	270	54	38	8	6	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	173	34	261	52	30	6	9	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	113	22	288	57	37	7	8	2
The school is led and managed effectively	204	41	263	52	17	3	2	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	230	46	237	47	19	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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.



5 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form College, Hove, BN3 7BW

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons, looking at your work and talking to you. We were impressed by how well behaved and polite you were. These were the main things we found out about your school. We judged that Blatchington Mill School provides those of you in Years 7'11 with a good education, however the standards in the sixth form are inadequate and a strong focus for improvement.

- Between Years 7 and 11, most of you make good progress in your learning and attain above average standards in GCSE examinations.
- The care, guidance and support you receive are good. This, along with the school's strong range of partnerships and the emphasis the school has on good levels of behaviour, helps you develop good moral, social, cultural and spiritual awareness.
- The school provides you with a curriculum that meets your needs and helps those of you who take advantage of the extra-curricular activities to develop into healthy and well-rounded young citizens. Well done on the school production; we were impressed by the dancing skills and talent we observed!

To help the school improve further the school's leaders have agreed to ensure that:

- significant improvements in teaching, curriculum and leadership in the sixth form will enable you to have a greater role to play in the main school and to attain the standards and progress of which you are capable
- in the main school, all teachers will consistently ensure more effective marking of your work, give you precise feedback on how to improve and check your learning in lessons more rigorously, to help you do even better in your studies.

The headteacher, senior staff and governors still have much to do to raise sixth form standards and realise their ambition of an inclusive 11-18 school.

We wish you all the best for your future.

Yours sincerely

Meena Wood

Her Majesty's Inspector

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