

Oathall Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126085
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	360005
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,140
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Rowena Chalk
Headteacher	Mrs Jill Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	31 October–1 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 31 lessons, observing 31 different teachers, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and students. They evaluated students' attainment over three years, schemes of work, policies, the college improvement plan and reports from the local authority's School Improvement Partner. They considered 112 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers and 214 responses to the students' questionnaire.

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

- The effectiveness of strategies to close the achievement gap between groups.
- Students' progress across Key Stage 3.
- The effectiveness with which the college's leadership and management are extending and embedding best practice in teaching and assessment.
- The impact on teaching and learning and curriculum development of the college's specialisms in science with a rural dimension and the visual arts.

Information about the school

Oathall Community College is a larger than average school, with a smaller proportion of girls than boys and very few students known to be eligible for free school meals. The college has a higher than average proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most students are of White British heritage, with few who speak English as an additional language.

Oathall is a training school, with specialist status for science and the visual arts with a rural dimension. The five-acre farm on site contributes to the college's curriculum and is a centre for primary and adult land-based education locally and nationally. Among the awards gained by the college are Sportsmark, the International School Award, Healthy Schools, Eco-School Silver and the Silver Artsmark. Oathall is a lead school for the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme (SEAL). The college is active within a local partnership of 20 primary schools and another secondary school. It is also part of the area partnership for Crawley and Mid-Sussex, with a focus on 14–19 provision. Oathall leads on the development of the Environmental and Land-based Diploma, in partnership with Plumpton College and schools in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

A strong sense of community, an enterprising approach to partnership and outstanding care for both staff and students are the hallmarks of this good and still improving college. The headteacher and her senior team, strongly supported by the college's businesslike and well-directed governing body, are taking effective action to enhance teachers' professional skills and to develop a broad and flexible curriculum that meets the needs of all individuals and groups. Their ambitious and persuasively presented strategic vision combines a clear focus on the achievement and well-being of Oathall students with support for learning in the wider community. Capacity for further improvement is good.

Students enter with broadly average prior attainment and leave with higher than average attainment, which represents good progress overall. Progress is better across Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. While most groups progress at a similar rate, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities who are identified as needing 'school action' have done less well. Recognising this, the senior and subject leaders have put in place interventions that are having a positive impact.

The quality of teaching and learning in most of the lessons observed was good or better. Typical strengths in teaching included secure and enthusiastic subject knowledge, a good rapport between teachers and students, well-structured lesson planning, lively pace, effective behaviour management, good questioning skills and confident use of modern technology. Where teaching is less effective it is most often because information about students' prior knowledge and ability is not consistently used to ensure that all students are presented with appropriate challenge.

Threaded brightly through every aspect of college life are the specialisms in science and the visual arts with a rural dimension. The farm is a centre of excellence for the college, the local community and for schools nationally and internationally. It provides memorable experiences and cross-curricular learning, generates an impressive network of partnerships, makes community cohesion an exceptionally strong and working reality and motivates students, including those otherwise at risk of dropping out of education. One student's response was typical: 'I wasn't very academic but now that I work on the farm I have come to love science and other subjects because I need them to complete my dream.' Hands-on farm experience also develops students' environmental awareness and contributes to their excellent understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Farm-based projects are among the ways in which students make an outstanding contribution to their local community. Students also take on significant responsibilities within the college. The head boy and head girl, for example, are routinely involved in the business of the governing body and the student council is both respected and influential.

Care, guidance and support for students are extremely well managed, with on-site resources such as the Learning Zone complemented by thoughtful collaboration with external agencies. Year leaders play an important role in coordinating academic guidance and pastoral support. The impact of this comprehensive and well-coordinated provision can be seen in the falling number of exclusions and improving attendance. Students value the opportunities and the support they are given. They are confident that they are being well prepared for continuing education or training and for future employment. Parents' responses are similarly positive; for example, 'I am impressed with the opportunities the children are given that enable them to extend and improve their understanding of the world, the wider community, their skills and self-esteem.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen progress, particularly in Key Stage 3, and further reduce differences in achievement by:
 - ensuring that the comprehensive information gathered about students' attainment and progress is consistently and effectively used in lessons to provide the maximum challenge for all groups and individuals.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students have positive attitudes to learning, collaborate well with each other, respond sensibly when asked to review their own and other students' work, and are keen to succeed. Attainment seen in lessons and students' work is above average for most groups, in keeping with examination performance over the last three years. The proportion gaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics has been significantly higher than the national average, with notable strengths in English, science and modern foreign languages. The college has made effective changes to strengthen rates of progress in mathematics, bringing mathematics into line with other core subjects. These have been underpinned by detailed analysis of data about students' progress and by rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning. Provisional GCSE results in 2010 show improvement. Most students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, although the targets set for those on 'school action' have not always been sufficiently challenging in the past. Students on vocational courses, including those taught largely off site, make good progress. Overall, achievement across the college is good.

As well as having an extremely comprehensive grasp of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and why it matters, students take full advantage of opportunities to keep fit. In the past academic year, for example, 88% participated in extra-curricular sports within the college and nearly 60% took part in inter-school sports events. Students feel safe, know where to go for help if needed and are confident that any difficulties will be promptly resolved. Attendance is good. While a minority of students voiced concerns about low-level disruption in lessons, behaviour observed during the inspection was generally good. Students readily accept responsibility for each other as peer mediators and prefects and are confident that their views are taken

seriously. They value their opportunities to contribute to the local community, especially through farm-based activities and work with primary pupils and older people. These experiences, together with work-related learning and their level of skill in literacy, numeracy and technology, equip students well for the future. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, supported through the curriculum and fostered by the college's ethos.

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	1
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?

Teaching is largely good or better. Best practice is modelled by advanced skills teachers in several subject areas and reinforced by peer observation and a collaborative approach to lesson planning. Teachers have the secure subject knowledge and the confidence needed to encourage students to play an active part in their learning, for example through group work. They have effective questioning skills and draw on a broad range of assessment techniques to check and consolidate students' learning. Marking of work generally, but not always, combines encouragement with guidance on how to improve. While plans routinely take account of varying abilities and learning styles, in lessons teachers do not always make clear what is expected of different students and so learning opportunities are sometimes missed.

The college provides a diverse and creative curriculum that meets the needs of all its students. In Years 10 and 11, in addition to a common core, students have a choice of three pathways, each leading to further education or training. Off-site courses are rigorously monitored and students' progress is closely tracked. The science and visual arts specialisms have led on the development of cross-curricular learning. Students appreciate opportunities on 'curriculum immersion days' to explore subjects in

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

greater depth, often with a cross-curricular element.

Student support managers contribute significantly to the college's outstanding pastoral care. They work closely with social services, the police, the local education welfare officer and other care agencies. The locality partnership to which the college belongs is funding the work of a 'transition mentor' and also a specialist in young people's emotional and mental health issues. This exceptionally well-managed network of expert care and support has a perceptible impact on students' well-being, as the good progress made by the most vulnerable students demonstrates. It supports the college's role as a lead school for the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The college's continuing improvement is driven by an ambitious vision shared by the governing body, senior leaders, middle leaders and staff. Planning is securely based on analysis of attainment and progress, rigorous monitoring and an enterprising approach to curriculum development. Readiness to embrace change is a strength. Management of staff's professional development, for example, is being revised to be more collaborative, requiring staff to share responsibility for researching and sharing new strategies and best practice. The development of partnerships, many linked to the college's specialisms, has been outstanding. The award-winning farm dramatically enhances students' learning and personal development and raises Oathall's profile both locally and nationally. The college has a very positive relationship with most parents; attendance at consultation evenings, learning forums and curriculum-linked workshops is consistently strong. The college goes to considerable lengths to engage with families that would not otherwise participate in their children's learning.

The college regularly reviews its equalities and community cohesion policies and audits their impact. It ensures equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination effectively. Students are extremely supportive of each other within the college, and play an integral role in the wider local community. International strands in the curriculum and links with continental Europe, Africa and India promote students' awareness of global diversity. Interaction with schools in Scotland and London contributes valuably to their understanding of multicultural Britain. The safety and well-being of students and staff underpin all planning. Comprehensive safeguarding procedures are in place and well understood at all levels as a result of good training.

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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The small proportion of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire were largely positive. Almost all expressed confidence in the leadership and management of the college, judged teaching to be good and were happy with their child's experience. A very small number expressed concerns about bullying and about disruptive behaviour in lessons, but the behaviour observed by inspectors in almost all lessons and around the college was good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

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

The inspection team received 112 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,140 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	42	38	58	52	10	9	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	41	37	69	62	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	31	28	69	62	7	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	34	30	59	53	10	9	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	32	29	70	63	6	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	28	25	61	54	17	15	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	29	66	59	6	5	3	3
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)	39	35	56	50	8	7	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	32	29	60	54	13	12	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	22	61	54	15	13	3	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	23	67	60	4	4	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	33	29	64	57	1	1	5	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	40	36	66	59	4	4	1	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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupils' 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.



8 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Oathall Community College, Haywards Heath, RH16 2AQ

Thank you for the cheerful courtesy with which you helped our inspection team by answering our questions and showing us your work. We share your belief that the college is led and managed well, and that it provides you with a good education through which you achieve good results.

We found that almost all teaching is good and some is outstanding. Your teachers have confidence and enthusiasm that come from knowing a great deal about their subjects and they plan lessons well to include a variety of ways for you to learn. They make sure you have opportunities to review your own progress and to offer each other constructive criticism, and their marking of your written work generally balances encouragement with specific guidance on how you can improve. Among Oathall's outstanding strengths are the care and support you are given. You also benefit from a curriculum that is broad and flexible enough to suit your individual needs and ambitions, extended by an impressive range of partnerships. The farm is an outstanding asset, both for you and for the local community. As one of you explained: 'I am not sure what I want to do yet – but I work at everything because the farm has really shown me what I need for my future life at work.' We could see that you make the most of chances to take on responsibility for each other, to develop as leaders and to make a valuable contribution to primary pupils and to older people in your community. You also benefit hugely from the college's extensive international links.

To ensure that the college continues to go from strength to strength, we have asked your headteacher to ensure that:

- in all lessons, especially in Key Stage 3, teachers use the information they have about what you already know and can do to set each of you a level of challenge that will ensure you fulfil your potential.

You can help by aiming high and working hard to achieve your challenging targets.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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