

Garth Hill College

Bull Lane, Bracknell, Berkshire RG42 2AD

Inspection dates

14–15 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- After the last inspection, the principal acted quickly in making much-needed changes. Leaders have worked with determination to hold staff to account more effectively and to improve standards.
- Historically, pupils make average rates of progress across a range of subjects. Current pupils make increasingly strong progress because teaching, learning and assessment have improved.
- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the last inspection. Most teachers have strong subject knowledge and they plan challenging activities that engage pupils. In a declining proportion of lessons where learning is less strong, leaders are taking firm action.
- Many teachers use the school assessment policy to ensure that pupils know how to improve their work. However, this is not consistently applied across departments.
- In lessons, pupils behave well. They have positive relationships with staff. This means that lessons are calm and orderly.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They wear their uniform smartly and are welcoming to visitors.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress because of the strong teaching that they receive. Leadership is good in the sixth form and students are looked after well.
- After a period of review, the curriculum is varied and balanced. Leaders have ensured that pupils have a range of choices of subjects to study in key stages 4 and 5.
- Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress in some subjects. However, they do not do as well as they could in other subjects, such as English and science.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils and students feel safe and are well cared for.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.
- Ensure that the school's approach to assessment is implemented fully so that pupils understand how to improve their work.
- Further strengthen the provision for disadvantaged pupils so that they make strong progress that allows them to catch up with other pupils nationally.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Following the previous inspection, the principal galvanised staff into action and created a culture of honest self-evaluation and improvement. With the support of staff, the local authority and governors, leaders have put in place effective improvement strategies and rigorous accountability systems. Consequently, staff are held to account well and standards across the school have improved.
- Leaders know the school well. Specifically, they have an accurate view of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and of pupils' behaviour. Leaders are determined and passionate about continuing to improve the school.
- After the last inspection, leaders renewed the school's behaviour policy and demanded higher standards of behaviour from pupils. Pupils, staff and parents recognise that pupils' behaviour has improved significantly as a result.
- Staff morale is high. They feel well supported by leaders. Staff told inspectors that leaders consider workload when setting school policies and that they believe the school is well led and managed.
- A review of the curriculum in 2017 led to significant changes in the structure of the curriculum, particularly in key stage 3. The curriculum is now broad and balanced. A wide variety of subjects is available to pupils choosing their GCSE examination options and 16 to 19 study programmes. Similarly, pupils in key stage 3 study a varied curriculum. This includes the study of French, Spanish and German.
- Staff training is well thought through. It is personalised depending on the needs of staff. Support staff, in particular, appreciate the availability and usefulness of training. Leaders are committed to providing training that matches the areas for improvement in the school's plans for improvement.
- The local authority supports the school well. They regularly review school standards, meet with staff and conduct monitoring activities. Together with leaders, local authority representatives have built an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This has helped leaders to decide on where further improvements are needed.
- Leaders have implemented their pupil premium strategy with vigour. Following a pupil premium review, leaders put in place increasingly effective measures. Staff are committed to removing the barriers that exist for disadvantaged pupils and in implementing the pupil premium strategy. Disadvantaged pupils' rates of progress are increasing. However, in some year groups, disadvantaged pupils fail to make strong enough progress so that they can catch up with other pupils nationally, particularly in English and science.
- Provision for pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is embedded in assemblies and citizenship lessons that are part of the curriculum. This provision is strong, and pupils find it interesting. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. For example, pupils told inspectors that they valued the age-appropriate sex and relationship education that was provided.

Governance of the school

- Governors are very knowledgeable about the school. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and have ensured that external agencies have been involved in evaluating standards. For example, the local authority recently conducted a review of standards.
- Governors take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. Several have completed safer recruitment training and they are knowledgeable about how to hold leaders to account. Governors check that safeguarding arrangements for the monitoring of the suitability of staff are carried out correctly by school staff.
- Regular reports from leaders inform governors of how well improvement strategies are working. Governors scrutinise these reports through a programme overseen by a 'governor scrutiny panel' attended by governors and leaders. They check what leaders tell them is accurate by making visits to the school and carrying out monitoring activities, such as visits to lessons with a member of staff.
- Governors check the governing body's training needs so that they can put training in place that is needed. There is a good breadth of expertise across the governing body. Governors are committed and effective.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff implement strong safeguarding practices to ensure that pupils feel safe. Staff have a good understanding of local safeguarding-related issues and they work well with local agencies, including the local authority and the police.
- Staff are well trained. They share safeguarding information with each other in weekly meetings to make sure that vulnerable pupils who need help receive support.
- Pupils complete well-being surveys so that staff are kept up to date on pupils' emerging concerns or worries.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Since the previous inspection, teaching, learning and assessment have improved.
- Some variation in the quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science still exists. However, most lessons are purposeful, well planned and successful in generating pupils' enthusiasm. Nevertheless, in some classes, a lack of precise planning means that activities lack challenge and pupils lose interest. However, leaders' actions and successful strategies to improve teaching mean that weak teaching is becoming increasingly rare.
- In most subjects, such as humanities, performing arts, music and design technology, teachers have high expectations. They use their strong subject knowledge, well-established routines and clear explanations to develop a purposeful atmosphere in lessons. Consequently, pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and they make good progress. For example, in music, Year 7 pupils deepened their knowledge of

musical symbols and applied it to classical music by watching and listening to an animation and responding to well-thought-through questions from the teacher.

- Teachers know their pupils well. As a result, pupils respond positively to teachers' instructions and they work well with their peers.
- Pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans make good progress in the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) resource base, 'Rise@GHC', because teachers provide challenging and interesting activities. Teaching assistants know the pupils well and provided well-timed and thoughtful support.
- Leaders introduced a new assessment and feedback policy in 2017. Many pupils benefit from the useful and precise feedback that they get from their teachers. Pupils frequently check and correct their work. Nevertheless, the school policy is not consistently applied across subjects. As a result, too many pupils do not know how to improve their work.
- Most parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, believe that their children are taught well and that they receive valuable information on how well their children are doing in their subjects. Several parents used the questionnaire's free-text facility to comment on the improvements in teaching, learning and assessment since the last inspection. For example, one parent commented, 'My son and daughter have noticed a marked improvement in classroom behaviour and the quality of teaching'. However, several parents expressed concern about the high staff turnover and the lack of permanent teachers in the past.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They also understand how to keep themselves safe online.
- Pupils receive impartial careers advice. There are a variety of approaches to careers education across year groups. These approaches include using visiting speakers from local industries and universities to speak to pupils about possible career options. As a result, pupils feel supported in choosing their GCSE examination options and in deciding their next steps after Year 11.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They talked animatedly to inspectors about the improvements since the last inspection. They wear their uniforms smartly and are very well mannered to visitors.
- Leaders have made a concerted effort to ensure that pupils are involved in decision making in school. Pupils told inspectors that they are involved in deciding on what needs to change in school and in informing staff about concerns that pupils have. Pupils have the opportunity to record their opinions on video in a school 'TARDIS' that sits in the middle of the school's open social area. These videos inform the school council on what is important to pupils and what their views are.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- On the whole, pupils behave well in lessons. Positive relationships mean that pupils respond quickly to teachers' instructions. They listen to each other respectfully and support one another in their work. In a small proportion of lessons, some pupils lose focus and do not concentrate as well as they could. However, these occurrences are declining.
- During social times, pupils get on well together. Many pupils socialise with each other in the well-resourced outside areas. Others use the school's canteen or the large open area in the centre of the school. Outside, pupils play sports, including table tennis and football, or use the exercise equipment. There is a harmonious atmosphere around school during social times.
- Bullying is rare in school. Pupils report bullying if it does occur and they told inspectors that staff take it seriously and deal with it well if it does happen. With the support of staff, pupils work hard to maintain the school's inclusive nature and provide support for vulnerable pupils. For example, pupils have been instrumental in creating 'autism champions'. These pupils ensure that the views of pupils who have autism spectrum disorder are represented and understood.
- Attendance is broadly the same as the national average for secondary schools. Strategies to improve attendance have been effective in encouraging those who are persistently absent to attend school more frequently. Consequently, the proportion of pupils persistently absent has declined sharply over the past year.
- The small proportion of pupils who attend alternative provision are well cared for. Leaders work closely with alternative provision staff to ensure that these pupils are effectively supported so that they can complete worthwhile qualifications.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2018, pupils at the end of key stage 4 made progress similar to other pupils nationally across a range of subjects, including mathematics, English and science. However, disadvantaged pupils achieved on average half a grade less across a range of subjects when compared with other pupils nationally with similar starting points.
- Current pupils make increasingly strong progress, particularly in English, mathematics and science, because of improving teaching and a more stringent accountability system. Leaders prioritise subjects based on what they know about pupils' progress within them. This was very effective in 2018. For example, Year 11 pupils' attainment improved sharply in geography, German and other modern foreign languages.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils across subjects is improving. In some subjects, such as history and mathematics, they make strong progress. However, in other subjects, their progress is not as strong but is improving.
- Work in pupils' books shows that most pupils are making strong progress across year groups. For example, in mathematics, in Year 9, the most able pupils deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts by attempting increasingly complex questions set by the teacher.

- The rates of progress of pupils with SEND and pupils with EHC plans was below average in 2018. However, currently, these pupils are making good progress because of the closely-tailored support that they receive and the improvements in teaching, learning and assessment.
- The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision make strong progress so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The school's sixth form provides predominantly A-level courses for a large number of students. A small proportion of students study a mixture of vocational and academic courses.
- 16 to 19 study programmes offer a wide range of subjects to be studied, mostly, at A level. Since September 2017, Cambridge Technical Qualifications have been added to the offer in order to provide a more varied offer. Students studying vocational courses make good progress.
- Just under half of the school's Year 11 pupils opted to join the sixth form in 2018. Other local colleges and schools offer a varied range of courses and many Year 11 pupils opt to follow these courses. Nevertheless, leaders have plans to increase the popularity of the sixth form.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Leaders ensure that they monitor and evaluate the provision well.
- Teachers have high expectations of students. They carefully plan activities that encourage students to work with each other and independently. Consequently, students make strong progress.
- Students' outcomes are good. Historically, students make strong progress across their chosen subjects at A level. Current students also make good progress because of effective teaching and high-quality pastoral support.
- Students are well informed about the career paths available to them when they leave sixth form because of good-quality careers advice. Leaders invite external speakers from various career paths to speak to students.
- Students are well cared for by committed staff. There are a wide range of opportunities to participate in wider school life. For example, students are encouraged to take on leadership roles within the school, such as becoming school prefects or leading school council sessions. Many students take up these opportunities.
- There are high levels of punctuality and attendance in the sixth form. Over the past two years, attendance has improved dramatically because of leaders' strategies and the increasing commitment of students to their studies.

School details

Unique reference number	110069
Local authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	10088115

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,579
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	194
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Liz Dolby
Principal	Keith Grainger
Telephone number	01344 421122
Website	www.garthhillcollege.com
Email address	reception@garthhillcollege.com
Date of previous inspection	13 July 2018

Information about this school

- The principal joined the school in September 2007.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British background.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is below the national average for secondary schools.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average for secondary schools.

- Off-site provision at College Hall, Wokingham is used by the school for a small proportion of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a range of lessons across key stages 3, 4 and 5. Senior leaders joined inspectors for several observations.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, the principal, governors and local authority representatives.
- Samples of pupils' work were looked at by inspectors and inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school.
- Inspectors formally met with groups of pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5. Inspectors also considered the views of pupils from the 82 pupils who responded to the confidential questionnaire. Inspectors also spoke to a wide range of pupils during social times and during lessons.
- The views of 224 parents who responded to the confidential Ofsted parental questionnaire, including 219 written responses were taken into account by inspectors.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff from meetings with groups of staff and from the 96 staff who responded to the confidential questionnaire.
- Documentation was scrutinised by inspectors including the school's plans for improvement, its self-evaluation, reports on attendance and behaviour, records relating to pupils' safety, minutes of governing body meetings and information on pupils' outcomes.

Inspection team

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Andrew Foster	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Baker	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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