

John O'Gaunt Community Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110050
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	310185
Inspection date	3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Armitage 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
Number on roll	
School	536
6th form	77
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Adey
Headteacher	Mrs L Bartlett
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Priory Road Hungerford RG17 0AN
Telephone number	01488 682400
Fax number	01488 681283

Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the quality of management at all levels and its response to students' achievement; aspects of care, support and guidance for students; and the development of the sixth form. Other aspects of the college's work were not investigated in detail but many were covered incidentally as a result of inspecting the focus issues.

During the inspection, the inspector toured the college; spent time visiting classes; saw examples of students' work, reviewed school documentation, interviewed representatives from senior management, middle management, other staff and the Chair of Governors. He interviewed students and held a meeting with the student council.

Description of the school

The college is a relatively small comprehensive with sixth form mainly serving the town of Hungerford and the surrounding villages. It has been designated as a technology college. Students generally come from economically secure backgrounds although there are pockets of deprivation. Students are mostly white British. The college has a good reputation for helping students with learning difficulties and so has a higher than average number of students with statements of educational need. There is a Study Support Department offering learning and other help. The college works in close partnership with local primaries, the further education college and neighbouring secondary colleges. Also on site are a leisure centre, a private nursery and a Youth and Community centre.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The college provides a satisfactory standard of education but has many good and even outstanding features. In Key Stage 3, standards are broadly average but, because of their below average starting points, students make good progress. In Key Stage 4, standards are about average and students make satisfactory progress. In the sixth form, standards are also average and they make satisfactory progress. There are patterns in the college's data, one of which indicates the under-performance of middle ability boys. Students with learning difficulties make particularly good progress.

A key feature of the college has been the steady improvement in standards from very low levels a few years ago. In 2006, the progress made by students in Key Stage 3 took the college into the top 5% nationally. In 2007 there was a dip in GCSE results primarily because of staffing difficulties. However, current evidence is that results will once again improve this academic year and the rising profile maintained.

Students' personal development is good. There is a calm, purposeful atmosphere in the college, largely due to the mature way in which most students conduct themselves. Students progressively become more confident, developing self-awareness and consideration for others. They are very aware of the issue linked to healthy lifestyles; for instance, they like the healthy range of food provided in the canteen and the number of students using the facility has been maintained at over 50%. A large number of students also use the community leisure centre.

Students generally get on well together; they are not afraid to speak out in class and elsewhere. This was very clear in the oral presentations to fellow students made by candidates seeking election to the student council. Behaviour is good with relatively few instances of bad behaviour; none of the students interviewed had suffered bullying. The college has very clear, effective systems for dealing with this including peer mentoring by students. Students have a reasonable cultural awareness. For instance, they have useful links with the local community and the college's connection with another school in Ghana has had significant spin-offs - in particular, in improving of students' understanding of other societies. Having said all this, the college acknowledges that it could do still more to develop students' confidence and independence and increase awareness of the different cultures of the UK.

The quality of learning is good. The college is progressively developing an ethos of learning. It has impacted most on younger students and they are taking their improved attitudes with them as they get older and move up the college. This and the innovations in teaching are the main reasons why Key Stage 3 results are better than later years. A significant feature of learning is that the college is increasingly encouraging students to take their own initiative and become more independent in their learning. This can be seen in class, in homework, and by the encouragement to parents to become more involved in the education of their children. In some respects, it is still early days but the practice is beginning to have a really positive effect lower down the college.

The quality of teaching is good because it has played a big part in improving students' progress in recent years. Staff - teachers and others are dedicated and are keen for students to do well. Students recognise this and say that teachers and assistants are approachable. Staff are also very focused on improvement. They accept challenges and are flexible. They are very willing to 'have a go' and evaluate the quality of their work after trying something new. All are involved

in regular professional development. Students' work is regularly assessed and the information is used to influence further teaching and tailor it as far as possible to students' needs.

The quality of the curriculum is very good. Given that John O'Gaunt is a small college, the flexibility offered is impressive. For instance, Year 10 'gifted and talented' students may take three sciences and additional GCSEs in statistics, religious education and information and communications technology. Middle ability students may take a range of GCSEs or vocational subjects including a BTEC course. Less able students may choose a Level 1 BTEC vocational course and a Certificate in Working Skills. This is supplemented by links with a local college which provides other vocational qualifications. For students who have special educational needs, entry level / level 1 vocational courses and literacy/numeracy support are provided by the Study Support Department. Because of the range of courses on offer, students are well-prepared for future work and study.

The quality of care, support and guidance is outstanding. Academic guidance is excellent - for instance, students have targets in each subject and know what they need to do to improve. There is also very good pastoral support. The new system with groups of students of different ages supported by a mentor teacher-tutor and helped by administrative staff meets both academic and social needs very well. Support for those with learning difficulties is outstanding. There are clear systems in place for meeting students' very different needs and these needs are kept under constant review with adjustments made when necessary. There is good attention to detail. Liaison with outside bodies is very good as are links with parents. Though all this is excellent, what is really impressive are the relationships between the students and those supporting them - they are very positive, professional and supportive.

The quality of leadership and management is also good, resulting in the college's rising results profile. The reason why leadership and management at all levels are good is that managers know the college well and are all in agreement about the principal ways forward. They have responded to (and are responding to) areas for development well and the result is the rising quality in recent years of both academic achievement and personal development from very low levels. The college's self-evaluation is outstanding; responses such as the introduction of the new academic/pastoral mentoring system and improvements to the assessment system as well as continued development of the overall college ethos.

The college has just been re-designated as a technology college and has added the rural dimension to its specialism. This will provide a basis for the introduction of the environment and land-based diploma. Other changes that have been brought about by specialist status are improvement in attainment in the specialist subjects; greater use of technology in teaching and learning across the college; improved facilities and infrastructure to facilitate learning; and improved links with local primary schools and the further education college.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards overall are average and students make satisfactory progress. However, some students do very much better than this. Students' personal development is good. For example, Year 12 students undertake community service for one hour per week. In college, this can take the form of acting as classroom assistants, completing Sports Leader Awards and refereeing college fixtures. The Head Boy and Head Girl come from the sixth form and represent the students on the governing body. Sixth formers also manage the common room budget.

What is interesting is the way in which the college is successfully recruiting more students into the sixth form. This includes students who, hitherto, would not have considered staying on. As a result, the college has been conscious that not all the existing provision is as suitable as it could be for this new clientele. Accordingly, teachers have provided new courses and the college is actively involved in negotiating joint courses with neighbouring institutions to improve provision even further. Current sixth form teaching is good but with new courses tailored even more to students' needs, it is likely to be even more effective.

What the school should do to improve further

The college has very good management; the quality of its self-evaluation is outstanding. The college has a highly relevant development plan; it sets out very clearly what the college has to do to improve further. Therefore, there is just a single recommendation for improvement.

- Undertake, effectively, the points outlined in the current three-year development plan.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

15 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of John O'Gaunt Community Technology College, Hungerford, RG17 0AN

As you know, I recently inspected your college. I met many of you including the members of your college council. I am very grateful for the help that you gave me. As I said when I met you, you are the college's 'customers' and therefore, your opinions are very important.

I was very impressed by the efforts that you and your teachers have been making to ensure that you get good examination grades. You are doing really well in Key Stage 3. The job now is for you to do just as well in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. You can do this. You have good attitudes to learning; your teachers are good and want you to do well. They are keen to support you. The headteacher and other managers have good plans for the college to help everyone do better. I also like the way in which you are participating more and more in the management of your college through your council and some of the other things you do.

One big thing I really would like to see is you taking more charge of your own learning. You need to ask questions, find out answers and then reach your own conclusions. Teachers should not be doing this for you all the time because when you have to sit examinations, it is what you know and can do that counts.

I also want to say that I was impressed by the way you keep your college clean and by its facilities. You have good administrative, catering and grounds maintenance staff who do a lot to help you keep the college a nice place to be and to make everything run smoothly.

I hope my few comments in this letter have been helpful. Once again, my thanks for your help and my very best wishes for the future.

Paul Armitage

Her Majesty's Inspector