

Midhurst Rother College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135760
Local Authority	N/A
Inspection number	364408
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham HMI

Type of school	Academy
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	859
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Anderson
Headteacher	Dr Joe Vitagliano (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
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Introduction

This inspection was carried by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 34 lessons, observing 34 different teachers, and held meetings with members of the college's local governing body, college leaders, staff and students. They evaluated students' attainment since the establishment of the college, schemes of work, policies, the college's development plan and minutes of governors' meetings. They considered 185 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers and 150 responses to the students' questionnaire.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- It evaluated the impact of strategies being developed to raise standards, especially in core subjects.
- It considered how effectively best practice in planning and teaching is being disseminated and embedded across all departments and each key stage.
- It reviewed the impact of the college's mathematics and science specialism.
- It explored how successfully sixth form provision is responding to students' needs and aspirations.

Information about the school

Midhurst Rother College is sponsored by the United Learning Trust (ULT) and opened in January, 2009. It currently operates on two sites, pending the completion in 2012 of new buildings on the Midhurst site. Provision for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is based at the Midhurst site and that for Key Stage 3 just over a mile away at Easebourne. The college's mathematics and science specialism came as a legacy from one of the predecessor schools. The curriculum is extended through links with: further education colleges; Chichester University; Winchester College; local businesses, including Rolls Royce; and organisations such as the South Downs National Park Authority.

Most students are of White British heritage, with few who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Also below average is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is the first full inspection of the college by Ofsted. A monitoring visit was made in May 2010 to check the college's progress since becoming an academy.

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

Carefully and intelligently, the college's leaders are laying the foundations of a well-integrated and ambitious community. At present, the college offers a satisfactory quality of education but there is evidence that its capacity for further improvement is good. The Principal and senior leaders are strongly supported by governors and, together, they are determined that Midhurst Rother should develop a distinctive character within the United Learning Trust. Their assessment of the college's strengths and areas for improvement is soundly based and their development plan is both ambitious and practical. Strategies to improve teaching and learning are having a positive impact. Despite initial anxieties amongst the local community, recognition of the college's strengths is growing. This comment reflects the views of many parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire: 'When my son first started at Midhurst Rother College, he found it daunting but his form tutor and pastoral year head worked closely with him and also with us to help support him. The result is that he is happy, with a good set of friends, and is achieving well.'

There has been an upward trend in attainment over two years. Results in GCSE modules taken in Years 10 and 11 and the college's analysis of students' work show that attainment is now broadly in line with national averages. This represents satisfactory progress. The college has rightly identified as a priority the strengthening of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. While there are examples of good practice, targets for the most able are not consistently challenging enough to drive good progress. Lesson plans set out clearly what students are expected to learn, note differences in students' needs and weave in opportunities for assessment. These strengths are not, however, always reflected in lessons. Unevenness in the effectiveness of teaching is matched by differences in marking. The best combines encouragement with advice on how to improve, often using questions to prompt further thinking. Time for students to absorb and respond to such guidance is not often given during lessons. When students review each other's work, they are not always clear about how to evaluate it helpfully. The curriculum is steadily developing with the addition of more vocational options but, as college leaders acknowledge, it does not yet meet all needs fully.

Students feel safe and are justifiably confident that any difficulties will be promptly and effectively resolved. Pastoral care is well managed and effective. Although occasionally unnerved by boisterous older students, younger ones do not feel at risk of being bullied. Their confidence is underpinned by the college's outstanding safeguarding provision, which includes comprehensive and regularly updated training

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of staff and governors, clear and effective lines of accountability, meticulous record-keeping, procedures for safe recruitment and rigorously monitored health and safety systems. Through roles such as head boy and head girl, the student council, working groups, team responsibilities and work with primary pupils, students make an outstanding contribution to the life of the college and to the wider community. Most have a positive attitude to learning and behave well in and out of lessons. The distracting behaviour of a few occasionally inhibits their own progress and that of others, generally when teaching lacks pace and does not encourage active learning.

While the overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory, recent changes in leadership and management are making a positive difference. Although current students feel well served, the curriculum is not currently broad and varied enough to support the intention of governors and college leaders that the sixth form should grow in size and strength.

Students have an impressively well-informed perspective on their place not only within the college and the local community but also within multicultural Britain and beyond. This is developed largely through the college's partnerships with schools set in contrasting social, economic and cultural contexts in this country and overseas.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on recent improvements in attainment and accelerate progress, especially in core subjects, by:
 - presenting all students, including the most able, with challenging and regularly updated targets
 - strengthening literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better by:
 - ensuring that the strengths apparent in planning are implemented in lessons and that teaching consistently matches students' different learning styles and capabilities.
- Strengthen the use of assessment to enhance learning by:
 - ensuring that all marking gives clear guidance on how to improve and that students are given time to reflect and respond
 - providing students with key points to use when evaluating other students' work, and keeping a check on the quality of their evaluations.
- Extend the breadth and variety of the sixth form curriculum.

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Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Able students have progressed more slowly than others but boys are now doing as well as girls. Students respond well to a combination of support and challenge. This was apparent in a Year 8 mathematics class, for example, where one student commented: ‘Some of the work is difficult but it’s enjoyable.’ Many in this class were working confidently at levels higher than average for their age. Improved progress by students with special needs and/or disabilities is closing the gap between them and their contemporaries. They clearly enjoy learning and are keen to do well. In a lower ability Year 7 science class, for instance, students worked steadily and cheerfully in small groups, following instructions carefully and with a shared sense of achievement on completing the task.

The college is felt to be a safe and friendly place. Attendance rates are above average. The number of fixed-term exclusions has greatly reduced over the past year and permanent exclusions are rare. Students know what constitutes a healthy lifestyle but not all make healthy choices. Sports clubs and activities such as dance, however, are popular. Students very willingly take on responsibility for each other and make excellent ambassadors for the college, mainly through their work with local schools. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported by the mainstream and extended curriculum and by the college’s focus on personal development. While students respond well to work-related learning and opportunities to develop personal skills, relatively weak literacy and numeracy limit their preparation for the future.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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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How effective is the provision?

The proportion of teaching that is good or better has increased since the monitoring inspection in May 2010. Key strengths include: teachers' enthusiasm; secure subject knowledge; available information being well used in lesson planning; a productive rapport between teachers and students; effective questioning skills; clearly communicated expectations of what students are to learn; well-managed group work; and effective approaches to assessment. In a Year 7 music lesson, for example, a mixed-ability class progressed, with audible enjoyment and steadily expanding knowledge, from internet research into the origins of samba to exuberant performance. However, students' varied abilities and learning styles are not always fully catered for in lessons and, where pace and variety of presentation flag or the time allowed for an activity is misjudged, students lose concentration.

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements and, with the development of vocational options to complement core subjects, is now more successfully supporting students' varying needs. Partnership with a further education college provides worthwhile options for students otherwise at risk of dropping out of education. The move into the new building in 2012 will enable the college to offer more on site. Rising attainment and improving attendance indicate that provision is already having a positive impact. Well-managed links with other schools and local colleges and resources available through the United Learning Trust give students valuable opportunities that the college alone could not currently provide. Visits to theatres, art galleries and museums, projects in countries such as Vietnam and exchanges with students from continental Europe enrich the curriculum.

The impact of the specialism within the college has been limited. For each of the specialist subjects, mathematics and science, the main concern has been to raise attainment in their own areas. Changes in subject leadership and in the curriculum are having a positive impact. The introduction of BTEC science, for example, is providing an engaging and productive option for many students. The subject leader for mathematics recognises the need to improve students' numeracy skills across the curriculum, but this is not yet well enough established to have had a quantifiable impact. The specialism is, on the other hand, shaping strong partnerships with local primary schools and providing the impetus for events such as a 'fun maths' day for 200 primary pupils.

Care, guidance and support are strong. Pastoral leaders ensure that students' well-being and development are effectively monitored and help is promptly given when needed. They provide a valuable link with parents and carers as well as overseeing liaison with external agencies, whenever appropriate. Steps are taken to ensure that students who may be vulnerable and those from families with very limited resources are not excluded from any aspect of college life. Transition into Year 7 and from Key Stage 3 into Key Stage 4 is carefully managed. The positive impact of this care, guidance and support is evident in students' improving attendance and the falling exclusion rate.

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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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and middle managers share an ambitious vision, supported by well-applied analysis of information about attainment and progress, rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning and a thoughtful approach to curriculum development. They are driving improvement. The governing body meets its statutory obligations and its members present a very useful range of professional expertise. They are actively and helpfully involved in all aspects of college life and are rigorous in holding the college to account. Financial management is curriculum-driven and disciplined. The development of partnerships has been well managed, strengthening provision and extending opportunities for the college to make a valuable contribution to its local community.

The college regularly reviews its equalities and community cohesion policies and audits their impact. It is committed to and effective in ensuring equality of opportunity, respecting differences and tackling discrimination. Complementing the strong sense of community within the college, involvement in neighbourhood activities helps students build up a strong relationship with their local community. International strands in the curriculum and links with continental Europe, America, Africa and south-east Asia promote students' awareness of global diversity. Students' perspective on life in multicultural Britain is extremely well developed not only through the curriculum but also through links with their contemporaries in strikingly contrasted social, economic and cultural contexts. The safety and well-being of students and staff underpin all planning. Risk assessments are rigorous. Excellent safeguarding procedures are in place and well understood at all levels. The impact of the college's approach is reflected in the confidence of parents and carers that their children are safe and in students' sense of security.

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	3

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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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The prior attainment of those entering Year 12 is broadly in line with national averages. Very few leave at the end of Year 12: they are happy with their courses and the ways in which they are encouraged to become more independent in their learning. Overall, students make satisfactory progress, with little variation between different groups. Almost all entries for A level in 2010 achieved grades between A and E, but the proportion gaining high grades was relatively small. Links with Chichester University give students a helpful understanding of the opportunities as well as the challenges associated with higher education. The curriculum meets the needs of current students but is not broad and varied enough to support college plans for sixth form expansion.

Sixth form students are positive role models for others and make a valuable contribution to the life of the college, for example through the mentoring and support they give to younger students. They would like to have more opportunities to take on responsibilities. They undertake charity work locally, represent the college at public events and undertake community service overseas.

Regular monitoring of attainment and progress ensures that interventions by sixth form leaders and tutors are prompt and effective. Under the recently established leadership of a member of the college's senior leadership team, and with dedicated support from a governor, a realistic assessment has been made of current strengths and areas for development. Plans for enhanced provision are well developed and practical, and the capacity for further improvement is good.

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	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

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Less than a quarter of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. A number of those commented on unevenness in the quality of teaching and had concerns about behaviour that they felt were not always effectively addressed by the college. Evidence gathered during this inspection gives some support to these views. Most of those responding felt well informed about their child's progress, were confident that their child was kept safe and judged that their child enjoyed college. These perceptions were also supported by inspection evidence.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Midhurst Rother 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 185 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 859 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	43	23	124	67	13	7	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	51	28	122	66	7	4	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	67	36	107	58	6	3	4	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	44	24	96	52	34	18	4	2
The teaching is good at this school	33	18	117	63	22	12	5	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	29	16	108	58	36	19	3	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	8	115	62	39	21	3	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)	32	17	99	54	27	15	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	31	17	112	61	30	16	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	12	106	57	32	17	12	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	17	108	58	29	16	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	39	21	109	59	23	12	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	41	22	113	61	23	12	5	3

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



27 May 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Midhurst Rother College, Midhurst, GU29 9DT

Thank you for the cheerful and courteous help you gave to our team when we visited the college recently. We found that the college offers you a satisfactory and improving education. Plans for your move into the new building on the Midhurst site are well underway and are exciting.

Your college is well led and managed. The Principal and his senior leadership team have a very accurate picture of what is working well and what needs to be improved. We were pleased to know that you enjoy the opportunities you are given through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Although a few of you in Key Stages 3 and 4 occasionally behave in a manner that gets in the way of your learning and that of others in your class, most of you behave responsibly and contribute very usefully indeed to the life of the college. You also make a valuable contribution to your local community, for example through your work with primary schools. Links with other schools and colleges, both in this country and overseas, give you an extremely well-developed understanding of national and international communities and of your relationship to them. Pastoral support for you is good and we were very impressed by the care taken to ensure that you are kept safe.

We have asked your Principal to make sure that:

- you all have challenging targets that are regularly updated
- your literacy and numeracy skills are improved
- all teaching is as good as the best, with all teachers expecting high standards from you and teaching in a way that helps each of you fulfil your potential, whatever your style of learning
- marking of your work always gives you guidance on how to improve and that you have time to think about and respond to the advice given
- you are given the help you need when you assess other students' work
- sixth formers have a wider and more varied set of courses to choose from.

You can help by setting yourself ambitious targets and working hard to achieve them.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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