

Guthlaxton College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120256
Local Authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	339652
Inspection dates	1–2 December 2009
Reporting inspector	David Driscoll

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The registered childcare provision, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1472
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	390
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Dutton
Principal	John Keller
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 March 2007
School address	Station Road Wigston Leicestershire LE18 2DS
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Registered childcare provision	Abington House Pre-School
Number of children on roll in the registered childcare provision	20
Date of last inspection of registered childcare provision	21 March 2007

Age group	14–19
Inspection date(s)	1–2 December 2009 1–2 December 2009
Inspection number	339652339652

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 40 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, students and parents. They observed the college's work, and looked at: the data on students' performance, including their current progress, safeguarding records, plans for the future, and records of the college's own monitoring of its performance. The responses to 46 parents' questionnaires were considered, alongside responses to questionnaires from staff and students.

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

- how well the college leaders are identifying and addressing the causes of apparent differences in standards between subjects
- how well assessment information is used to tackle underachievement
- whether the college is successfully closing the apparent gaps in performance between different groups of students.

Information about the school

This very large specialist college for the performing arts is situated on the edge of the City of Leicester. A few students come from the city itself, specifically to take advantage of the college's specialism. An average proportion of students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also below average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is above.

The governors manage a pre-school crèche and nursery for the Early Years Foundation Stage. The college also hosts the privately managed Jigsaw Playscheme, which provides a summer play scheme for children with autism spectrum disorder. The college holds the Sportsmark, Artsmark, Career Mark and Healthy Schools awards.

A new principal was appointed in January 2008.

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

3

Main findings

Guthlaxton College provides a satisfactory education for most of its students. Provision in the pre-school and sixth form is good. The range of courses on offer in the sixth form has been considerably widened to include more vocational options that are better suited to the needs of some students. As a result, the number of students staying on to study in the sixth form has risen and they now make good progress because they are taught well and are studying subjects which they feel are more relevant to them. Nevertheless, students' punctuality to college in the mornings is poor and often goes unchallenged.

Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory, and students in these years make satisfactory progress, although there are big variations between subjects and different groups of students. The college has good information on students' prior attainment, but this is not used consistently to plan work that is suitably challenging for all learners. Students are attentive and work hard in lessons, but some more-able students surge ahead while others struggle to understand. This is not always picked up by teachers, so they often do not adapt the work to make it more appropriately challenging for the individuals concerned. Students with a statement of special educational needs learn much better than others because they receive carefully targeted support which is very well matched to their individual circumstances.

The college is currently going through a period of significant change. The principal has come down hard on disruptive behaviour and introduced a new system of rewards and sanctions. This has proved highly effective. Students say that behaviour is now much better; exclusions have fallen to below the national average. Students feel safe in college and are very confident that any concerns they have will be taken seriously. Vulnerable students, especially those in care, are very well looked after.

The college has sound systems for evaluating its own performance. The newly introduced learning reviews, where each subject department is the focus of an intensive evaluation, are very effective at identifying where improvements need to be made. However, the role played by some heads of department in these reviews is very limited and not all senior and middle managers are routinely involved in checking the quality of provision and pinpointing areas for improvement, especially in teaching and learning. As a result, some subject departments are being driven forward, while others are slow to implement change and lag behind. This variation in the quality of leadership and management across the college limits the capacity of the college to improve more rapidly. The progress made in areas such as behaviour

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and successful actions to address weaknesses identified at the previous inspection demonstrate the college's satisfactory capacity for improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all students make at least good progress by:
 - using information gained from assessments to plan activities that are suitably challenging for students of all abilities
 - listening to, observing and questioning students during lessons to gauge their understanding, and adapting tasks according to their individual needs.
- Ensure that all middle and senior leaders play a full role in driving improvement and ensuring the quality of teaching and learning across the college is of a consistently high standard.
- Improve punctuality in the sixth form by ensuring teachers challenge all late arrivals to form time more robustly.

About 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.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students join Year 10 with broadly average attainment. Examination results at Year 11 and the quality of work seen by inspectors were also broadly average. Many students say they enjoy learning and most achieve satisfactorily. There are some significant variations between subjects and groups of students. For example, progress is good in information and communication technology (ICT) and foreign languages where attainment is above average. In other subjects, for example mathematics and the performing arts, progress is slower, and standards are below average. In lessons, the most-able students often do well. They are able to work on their own initiative and enjoy the challenge of more difficult tasks. Lower and middle-ability students do not always make as much progress as they should, because the work they are given is sometimes too hard, or they do not have enough time to complete it. There is a marked difference in the progress of the categories of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Those with a statement of special educational needs receive high-quality support in lessons or in individual tuition and, consequently, make much better progress than others for whom work is often not modified sufficiently to meet their needs.

Students are well aware of how to lead healthy lifestyles and are increasingly putting their understanding into practice. The proportion smoking cigarettes has fallen significantly over the past year, for example, and all students take part in at least two and a half hours of physical activity each week. The college uses its specialist status well to ensure students play an active role in the community. Many are involved with drama and music, both in college and in the wider community. Sixth

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form students support their younger peers and have a voice in evaluating what the college provides. The performing arts contribute to students' cultural awareness, although their understanding is more limited of lifestyles and cultures that differ from their own, both in Britain and elsewhere.

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	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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects. Students always know what they are to do in lessons because the objectives are made clear and tasks are well explained. The tasks themselves do not always take enough account of the differences in students' abilities and the same work is often given to the whole class. Tasks set are usually difficult for middle and lower-ability students who struggle to keep up. This is not always spotted by teachers, because it is the students who know the answers and have their hands up that are questioned, rather than those who are sitting quietly and not putting themselves forward. Some very effective methods are used for checking students' understanding, for example, requiring the whole class to respond to questions on mini-whiteboards or with coloured cards. However, it is often the students who get the answer right that are questioned, rather than exploring others' misunderstandings.

The college has recently changed the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 to provide continuity with sixth form provision. These changes have not yet had time to impact on results, although students are happy with the new courses and the good guidance they receive about which to choose. Close links with the high schools are allowing

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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the development of GCSE examination modules to be taken in Year 9. The range of extra clubs and activities is good, especially in the performing arts and sport. The college’s constructive links with the high schools ensure a smooth transition across Years 9 and 10, so students settle quickly. The introduction of mixed-age tutor groups has improved this process, as new students can turn to those in Year 11 for advice. A very close eye is kept on vulnerable students for whom detailed records are maintained. The college liaises very effectively with all the partners involved in ensuring their safety and well-being.

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?

The principal provides strong direction to the college’s work. The priorities for improvement are well thought out and some, such as the actions taken to reduce the incidence of poor behaviour, are already proving very effective indeed. Other actions are taking longer to have an impact, particularly those relating to teaching and learning. Until very recently the quality of teaching was judged without sufficient account being taken of the progress made by students. This has now been rectified, so the college leaders have a more realistic view of the quality of teaching. Overall, the college’s drive to improve is satisfactory. Where senior and middle leaders take the initiative in driving areas of the college’s work forward, such as in the sixth form, ICT and foreign languages, there are clear signs of rapid progress. Other managers wait to be told what they need to do, so progress is much slower. The performing arts subjects have seen several changes of leadership in a short time, which have led to students making slower progress than they should in these subjects. The resulting variation in provision means that there are still gaps between the performances of different groups, which limit the promotion of equality to a satisfactory level. The college staff are well trained in safeguarding procedures and the senior leader responsible ensures that good practice is adopted across all areas of the college’s work. Parents feel welcome in the college. They are quick to raise concerns, knowing that these will be dealt with efficiently. The attendance at parents’ information evenings is high, and reports are of good quality. Governors ensure that statutory requirements are met, but their role in monitoring the college’s effectiveness is underdeveloped. The college has completed a good-quality analysis of its needs and provision for community cohesion. The subsequent action plan is detailed and comprehensive. The performing arts status of the college ensures that students engage with others from backgrounds different from their own, but the range is limited and the provision is on an ad hoc basis rather than targeting the specific

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groups that the college has identified.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress in Abington House. They join with skills and knowledge that are broadly as expected for their age and do well in all areas of learning. Children are well cared for and happy. Staff are trained effectively to assess and meet their needs. Children are given a range of different activities that are well matched to each child’s stage of development, although opportunities to take part in every day tasks such as tidying up are not routinely offered. Progress in children’s personal development is particularly good. They settle in quickly and are soon playing together. Even after just a few weeks they have learnt the importance of sharing and trying their best to be considerate to one another. The importance of good hygiene is stressed, so children know when, and how, to wash their hands. This is not helped by the inappropriately sized washing facilities, although these are soon to be replaced with smaller ones. Good links are maintained with primary schools to aid the transition to full-time education. Good improvement has been made since the setting was last inspected, especially in meeting all the areas identified for improvement. Governors now play a greater role in checking the quality of provision, although self-evaluation is not systematic in identifying strengths and areas for further improvement.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	2

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Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

Students do well in the sixth form. The increased range of courses has led to a rise in the number of lower-attaining students continuing their studies at the college. There are now several different qualifications available in many subjects, so students can follow a course that is most appropriate to their level of ability. Most of the teaching contains a good mix of the teacher’s expertise and students actively working independently. In lessons where progress is slower, teachers dominate any discussion, leaving students to listen passively or take notes. Marking is of good quality, and the results used well to identify misconceptions and where students need more support. Good teaching and individual guidance ensure that students of all abilities make good progress. There are many opportunities for students to play a leading role in college life. The students respond by taking seriously their role as mentors to younger students for example, supporting their academic work in lessons and outside of school hours. However, their punctuality in the mornings is poor and does not set a good example to others. Often lateness is not challenged with sufficient rigour. The good range of extra-curricular clubs and activities are attended with enthusiasm. However, time is often wasted when students should be engaged in private study. The sixth form is going from strength to strength, because it is well led and managed. Students receive good advice on moving to higher education. Close attention is paid to comparing sixth form outcomes with those of other colleges in the local authority, but less account is taken of national comparisons, which would allow more accurate evaluations of its effectiveness.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The response to the questionnaire was very low, because the college had only recently completed a similar survey. This much larger survey showed that parents are happy with all that the college provides, especially the quality of information they receive. The few concerns raised about behaviour related to past incidents and inspectors found that the improvements made had reduced the number of concerns considerably.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Guthlaxton 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 46 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1472 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	26	30	65	3	7	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	9	20	29	63	7	15	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	19	41	27	59	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	33	29	63	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	11	24	29	63	4	9	1	2
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	8	17	31	67	6	13	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	15	29	63	6	13	1	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)	14	30	26	57	3	7	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	11	24	29	63	5	11	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	24	26	57	6	13	2	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	13	27	59	6	13	2	4
The school is led and managed effectively	10	22	31	67	1	2	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	12	27	27	60	5	11	0	0

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 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 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.



3 December 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Guthlaxton College, Wigston, LE18 2DS

Many thanks for all the help you gave us when we visited your college. You told us that behaviour has improved considerably over the last year or so, and we agree. We found you to be well behaved and attentive in lessons. There are still a few of you who are immature and mess around, so you need to learn from others and act as responsibly as them. We found that you are getting a satisfactory education overall, and good in the sixth form. You make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11, and do well in Years 12 and 13. In the sixth form, the teachers know how well you are doing and use this knowledge to give you work that is well matched to your ability. This is not as good in Years 10 and 11, so some of you find the work a bit too hard or confusing. We have asked your teachers to make sure that you are given work that you will find challenging, but that you can succeed with if you really try your best. We have also asked them to check how well you are learning in lessons and then change the tasks if you are finding them too hard.

The staff take good care of you and are always there when you need help with any problems. This helps you to feel safe. You play a good part in the college, responding well to the many opportunities to take responsibility. Many more of you are now staying on into the sixth form, as the college provides a better choice of courses that are well suited to your needs and aspirations. However, those in the sixth form are often late in the mornings, which sets a poor example to other students, so we have asked your teachers to challenge this with greater rigour.

One area that remains to be tackled is the variation between subjects. In some subjects you do really well, but in others your progress is much slower. The principal has made many changes aimed at ensuring all the managers are driving their subjects forward and improving the quality of education you receive. This is working well in some areas, but others are slower to respond. So we have asked the principal and the governors of the college to ensure that all managers are identifying what they can do to improve, and then doing something about it.

With all best wishes for your future

Yours sincerely

David Driscoll
Lead inspector

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