

The Chalfonts Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110529
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310348
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Nigel Fletcher HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1821
6th form	332
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Burnage
Principal	Mrs Sue Tanner
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Narcot Lane Chalfont St Peter Gerrards Cross SL9 8TP
Telephone number	01753 882032
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Chalfonts Community College is a large school in a county where there is selection. Consequently, when pupils transfer from primary school their overall attainment is broadly average, but there are relatively few that are high attaining. The school is in an area of comparative advantage, although there are some pockets of social disadvantage. It is a designated school for physically disabled students, with ten places. In 1996 the school acquired specialist status in technology and also the Investors in People award. It has since achieved re-designation for both, and has also received many other national and local awards including the Charter Mark. It achieved training school status in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'A great school with a great attitude' was a typical comment from a parent. Inspectors agree that the Chalfonts Community College is a good school with many outstanding features. Students reach standards that, generally, are above those found nationally, particularly in mathematics. This represents good achievement from their starting points although progress in different subjects is variable. For example, the standards achieved in science, business and modern foreign languages at GCSE were not as high as those reached in other subjects. The high quality of the senior leadership team, supported by an outstanding governing body, is a key reason for the school's success. The principal has a clear vision for the direction of the school which is shared and supported whole-heartedly by her enthusiastic, conscientious and committed staff. Senior leaders have an excellent understanding of how the school is doing and the means by which it can improve further. Most middle leaders have developed good strategies for improvement. Actions are in place to develop more consistently good teaching and learning across subjects to raise attainment.

The personal development of students is outstanding. This results largely from the excellent care, guidance and support that they receive throughout the school. Parents report favourably on the progress and growing confidence of their children. For example, one commented, 'Staff have always encouraged and given my child self belief; this has made her a very confident young person', whilst another said, 'My three children love going to school and they are growing into responsible, well rounded members of the community.' The curriculum is exemplary, providing excellent opportunities to study from a wide range of academic and vocational subjects, and to participate in the many enrichment activities. Students enjoy their education and behave extremely well around the school. They feel safe and appreciate the assistance that teachers and other staff provide to those who experience difficulties of any sort during their time at school. In particular, the support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with physical disabilities, is exemplary, resulting in these students making excellent progress.

Teaching is good overall, with some examples of outstanding practice. However, in some other lessons insufficient attention is given to checking students' understanding, and homework policies are not adhered to consistently. The impact of the specialist status in technology on improving learning across the school has contributed to the school making good improvements since the last inspection. It recognises that there are still improvements to make, but well-developed plans are in place and it has good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The Chalfonts Community College sixth form is an increasingly popular choice in an area where there is a selective school system. This is because it is a good sixth form with many outstanding features. Progress is good, particularly in art, physical education and geography, and standards are now above average. Students can access an excellent curriculum of both academic and vocational courses, as well as a broad range of enrichment activities.

Teaching and learning are good and there are many facilities for students to learn independently. Leadership in the sixth form is effective in promoting a positive culture, and has identified clear

areas for improvement. Although the school provides feedback to students on progress, the setting and monitoring of challenging targets is not consistent across the subjects.

Students' personal development is excellent resulting in confident young people who are well prepared for higher education or employment. For example, there are many opportunities for them to take leadership responsibilities, including supporting teachers in lower school lessons and acting as student observers in lessons. Students thoroughly enjoy the sixth form and cite the support and encouragement offered by their teaching staff for whom they have a great regard. One student said, 'At the end of the day, the teachers are looking out for us.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring a more consistent focus on the progress of students in lessons and the marking of homework.
- Raise standards in science, business and modern foreign languages at GCSE by developing the role of leaders in improving teaching and learning in their departments.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students achieve well and attain standards that are above average. In Years 7 to 9 students make good progress, especially in mathematics; attainment in the national tests is above average in mathematics and science and broadly average in English.

By the end of Year 11 students perform well overall. Girls make similar progress to boys, but reach higher standards, and students with learning difficulties and disabilities make excellent progress. GCSE results have declined slightly since the previous year, but are still above the national average, representing good progress overall. Attainment at the higher levels at GCSE is good although there is some variation in performance between subjects. For example, students do not achieve as high grades in science, business, and modern foreign languages as they do in other subjects. Overall, the proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C grades is above the national average, as is also the case when including English and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' outstanding personal development and well-being makes a strong contribution to the calm and welcoming atmosphere of the school. Behaviour is exemplary, both in lessons and around the school. Where the behaviour of any student is in danger of becoming less than good, it is dealt with immediately and effectively by staff. Students thoroughly enjoy school and all that it offers, particularly their positive relationships with staff. Inspectors were told that 'every pupil is listened to and made to feel their opinion counts'. The school continues to work well to improve the rate of attendance, which is now good.

The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students readily volunteer for an unusually wide range of responsibilities throughout the school, treating them very seriously to support their peers both in and out of lessons. Students feel very safe in school and know that the adults in school support them well.

Students have an excellent understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. There is high participation in the wide range of opportunities available for exercise. Students express warm appreciation of the food provided by the school, and the healthy and appetising choices on offer are very popular, enabling the school to achieve the Healthy Schools award. Students' preparation for the world of work is excellent; their basic skills are secure and they develop very good team and communication skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. In some lessons it is outstanding. Teachers' excellent relationships with students create a good atmosphere for learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use resources well to help students learn. For example, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is particularly good, engaging students and bringing lessons to life. Teaching assistants work well in partnership with class teachers, supporting students with learning difficulties and disabilities to make excellent progress.

Lessons are planned thoughtfully to take account of students' varying abilities. Objectives for the lesson are shared so that expectations are clear. In an outstanding lesson in physical education the teacher continually checked the extent to which students met their learning objectives; students were asked to act as 'teachers' and 'assessors' to help judge progress and identify points for improvement. However, in some lessons teachers do not check how well students meet their objectives and whether they are making appropriate progress. Marking of classwork and homework is carried out regularly, but there are inconsistencies in how clearly it informs students about how to make further progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum at the Chalfonts College is outstanding. It provides a wide range of learning opportunities that caters very well for the interests, aspirations and needs of students. It ensures that students enjoy coming to school and are prepared well for their place in the wider community. For example, students can also gain qualifications in subjects such as sports leadership, digital art, electronics and astronomy. Many events, such as themed enterprise days, reinforce and extend the impact of the personal, social and health curriculum. The focus of food technology on the skills of preparing and cooking food ensures that students are well prepared for a healthy adult life. The extra provision for students with learning difficulties enables them to make excellent progress.

The curriculum is further enhanced by a rich and diverse range of activities, both curriculum-based and extra-curricular. These include clubs, trips and visits, and many artistic and sporting activities at all levels, for which there is great demand. Most students of all abilities participate with enthusiasm and dedication, making a valuable contribution to their academic and personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

'The school is supportive and provides a caring community in which children can thrive and reach their true potential.' This comment from a parent rightly sums up the outstanding care, guidance and support given to students. Procedures for safeguarding children are well established and statutory checks are in place. The exemplary guidance and support arrangements for students joining the school ensure a comfortable transition.

There are effective procedures for identifying the individual needs of all students and excellent systems to ensure early intervention and support. Strong links with external agencies ensure further specialist help with students' welfare if necessary. Students are confident that they can confide in the staff and that their problems will be quickly and effectively dealt with. All staff have students' interests at heart and work hard to ensure that these are met. As one student said, 'You get that safety net effect - if you fall there is always someone there to catch you.'

Support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is exemplary, resulting in excellent progress. The school is rightly proud of, and has achieved awards for, its work with those with physical disabilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The outstanding leadership of the principal provides a clear sense of direction and high expectations for the school's further development. Supported well by her leadership team, she fosters a climate of improvement with all staff, at all levels. This has led to a collective sense of responsibility for whole-school improvement and has increased expectations of what staff and students can achieve. The school's specialism in technology is well led. It has effected significant improvements in resources and contributes well to the outstanding curriculum for all students.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate, drawing on a growing range of data and the views of students, parents and staff. The school monitors learning and teaching regularly with a view to raising attainment. The school's views of the quality of teaching are accurate but lesson observations do not place sufficient focus on the learning of students and the progress they make. Middle leaders show a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their subjects, and most have developed good strategies for improvement. These provide good models for all departments to develop more consistent practice. For example, the need to improve attainment in some subjects at GCSE, such as science, business and modern foreign languages, is known by the school and effective strategies are in place to address this.

Governors provide excellent support for the school's strategic development. They know the school well through regular meetings and visits, and are both challenging and supportive. The school manages finances well, balancing its budget while finding resources to improve its accommodation, such as the new sixth form centre. Value for money is good. The views of parents, students and the local community are much valued and inform initiatives. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.

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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?	2	2
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

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?	1	1
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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	1
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

16 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Chalfonts Community College, Gerrards Cross, SL9 8TP

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, talking to your teachers and other staff and visiting lessons. Many of you and your parents told us how the good relationships between you and the staff meant that you enjoyed school and felt that you were progressing well.

You told us that your school provided a good education. We fully agree with this view and are satisfied that the school leaders have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school has many strengths and we were particularly impressed by:

- the way the school is led and the very high commitment of the staff in ensuring that you receive the best support and care in the school
- the excellent courses and other activities that the school provides to ensure that you have the best opportunities to make good progress in your academic and personal development
- your behaviour, your attitudes to learning and healthy living, and the way you treat each other with respect
- the commitment of the school to continue to improve the overall experience you receive.

To make your school even better we have recommended that it:

- continues to improve teaching and learning by ensuring a more consistent focus on your progress in lessons and the marking of your homework
- helps you improve your results by developing some middle leaders to establish consistency of good practice across all subjects.

The senior staff and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school and have plans to do it. We believe that if you work hard in lessons, and help the school put these plans in place, then standards will rise further. On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Nigel Fletcher HMI

Lead Inspector