

Gravesend Grammar School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118787
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313090
Inspection date	27 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	978
6th form	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Valerie Green
Headteacher	Elaine Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Pelham Road Gravesend DA11 0JE
Telephone number	01474 352896
Fax number	01474 331195

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; teaching and learning; leadership and management; care, guidance and support; and the impact on the school itself and on the community of the school's specialist science status. Evidence was gained from lesson observations, from discussions with leaders and pupils and from evaluation of a range of documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Gravesend Grammar School for Girls, which is spread over two sites about five minutes' walk apart, is oversubscribed. In September 2007, a small number of boys joined the sixth form. While most students are of White British heritage, there is a slightly larger than average representation of students from minority ethnic groups, mainly Indian, with about 10% who do not have English as their first language. The school collaborates with Gravesend Grammar School for Boys to provide teaching in minority subjects in the sixth form. It has participated in the Gravesham Post 16 Consortium with seven other schools since 2003. In 2004, it was awarded specialist science status. The current headteacher has been in post since September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Gravesend Grammar School for Girls is a good school, with a record of extremely high academic standards and strong pastoral care greatly valued by staff, students and parents. Over recent years, it has gained Investors in People and Investors in Careers status, the International School award and the Silver Artsmark and Sportsmark, which indicate the range and quality of its activities. The school's leadership and management are responding well to changing national expectations of what education should encompass and to the options now available to students. The new headteacher has led a timely and rigorous review of the school's strengths and areas for development. There has been extensive consultation within the school and time well spent investigating good practice elsewhere before deciding on changes to the curriculum and to the network of care, guidance and support for students.

Academic standards are exceptionally high, as shown by the results gained by students in national examinations. In 2007, for example, 22% of Year 11 students gained ten or more A*/A grades at GCSE. Sixth form students also reach exceptionally high standards. Achievement is good overall. A rigorous system of assessment, target setting and tracking of individual progress is now in place, combining academic guidance and pastoral support to excellent effect, especially for Years 7 to 11. It is much appreciated by students. As one said: 'I've had so much help...They keep checking up on us...You don't feel under pressure to beat others. They ask we do our best to reach our own targets.' Marking of written work is constructive, balancing encouragement with specific advice on how to improve. Although questionnaire returns showed concerns amongst a very small number of parents, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make similar progress to others in their year. There is excellent support from the school and, when appropriate, from external agencies. Very thorough child protection systems and health and safety procedures are in place. Care, guidance and support are good in the sixth form. Students value advice about subject choices and career options from their tutors and organisations such as Connexions. The small number of boys in Year 12 speak positively about the care taken to ensure they settle successfully and are properly provided for. Students develop the skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) needed to prepare them well for later life but opportunities for work-related or vocational learning are limited. This is a highly cohesive community, described by the chair of governors as 'a strong body of caring people'. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students take an active interest in the wider community, through the arts, activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, voluntary service and work with local primary schools. They generally enjoy school and are keen to do well. Attendance rates are excellent. Adults and students treat each other with courtesy and care. It is noticeable that friendship groups are cheerfully inclusive, with students from minority ethnic backgrounds well integrated and academically successful. Students are emphatic that bullying is rare and always effectively dealt with by staff, by senior students or by the peer group itself. They respond enthusiastically to opportunities to take on responsibility, for example as school officers or on the school council, and some sixth form students provide tutoring for younger ones in subjects such as mathematics and modern foreign languages. Students understand well the importance of a healthy lifestyle and of keeping fit, although not all of them make healthy choices. They enjoy the extensive range of clubs and activities offered and appreciate the sports element in their curriculum. Teachers have confident subject knowledge and a positive rapport with their students, who, in turn, are willing learners. Students enjoy and feel they benefit most from lessons that are interactive and offer scope for teamwork and for independent learning.

Systematic monitoring of teaching and analysis of students' progress determine the school's priorities for teachers' continuing professional development. There has, for example, been a focus on questioning techniques, with evidence that most teachers are now using open questions to stimulate higher order thinking in their students. Teachers appreciate the importance of pace and variety and, in many cases, use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively. Whilst there is much good practice across departments, with teaching that is both engaging and challenging, this is not yet consistently embedded. Lesson plans do not always cater for differences in ability within a teaching group, with teachers sometimes relying upon the most able students to exploit the possibilities of a topic or activity for themselves. The headteacher and senior team are aware of which staff members will benefit most from additional support and heads of faculty are given time to coach individual teachers and monitor their progress.

The current curriculum is good, with the strengths characteristic of a successful grammar school. Plans are in place for a more skills-based and inter-disciplinary approach in Years 7 to 9 to encourage independent learning and extend students' confidence and enterprise in the use of ICT. The school's specialist science status has had a very positive impact not only in the provision of resources but also in fostering inter-disciplinary activities such as residential trips to science centres in Belgium and France. The sixth form curriculum successfully supports the needs and aspirations of most students, although vocational options are limited.

The leadership and management team show a good understanding of the school's strengths and needs as they plan for its redevelopment under the government's 'Building Schools for the Future' scheme. The headteacher's open and collaborative style of leadership has ensured that the process of review and change is widely understood and supported. She sets challenging and well-focused targets for the school as a whole, which are then translated into departmental action plans. The effectiveness of recent initiatives and current planning is not yet quantifiable but overall capacity to improve is good. There is evidence of systematic and rigorous monitoring and a readiness to tackle any weaknesses in teaching, in middle management or in curriculum provision. The governing body successfully holds the school to account and links governors' work with each faculty, and there are sound financial controls. A particular strength is the management of specialist status as a science college, both within the school and within the wider community. Amongst the most successful projects is 'The Science Roadshow', an interactive workshop for local primary schools. As a 'Lead in ICT in Science' school, Gravesend Grammar School for Girls has made a significant contribution to the development of ICT in the teaching of secondary school science across the south east of England.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The great majority of Year 11 students choose to stay on into what is a good and well-managed sixth form. Retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are very high. Students make good progress and reach standards that are exceptionally high overall. The decision to admit boys has proved successful, although numbers are still very small. The school recognises that the proportion of students gaining A and B grades could be even higher and a recent evaluation of the sixth form has correctly identified areas for further development, covering aspects of target setting, teaching and learning, and use of study time by students.

Students have a very positive attitude to their work. Thoughtful and purposeful discussion was a feature of most lessons observed during the inspection. A broad choice of AS and A level subjects is offered and sixth formers benefit from the additional choices provided by

collaboration with Gravesend Grammar School for Boys and, to a lesser extent, by participation in the Gravesham Post 16 Consortium. Vocational options are limited but students do not feel this to be a disadvantage since the subjects currently offered equip them for entry to an appealing range of university courses. There is good careers guidance, complemented by events such as 'Challenge of Management' and work-related visits that help students make realistic choices about their future.

Sixth-formers play an important role in the wider life of the school, taking on responsibilities, developing leadership roles and acting as mentors for younger students. They enjoy and benefit from opportunities to work with children in local primary schools, often as part of the science college programme.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Improve consistency in the quality of teaching and learning so that the methods used always challenge and support all learners.

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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	1	1
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	2	

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	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

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	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
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

29 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Gravesend Grammar School for Girls, Gravesend DA11 0JE

When we visited your school recently to see how well it is doing, you made our task much easier and hugely enjoyable by the cheerful and courteous way you answered our questions, showed us your work, and shared your thoughts with us.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to let you know what we feel your school does particularly well and how it might be even better. We agree that it is a good school with a good sixth form. As some of you explained to us, amongst its outstanding strengths are its friendliness and the well-judged care, guidance and support you are given by your teachers and by students in the sixth form. It was good to hear that you feel really safe and are confident that any difficulties will be quickly and sensitively resolved. Helped by good teaching, you make good progress in the main school and in the sixth form.

So that you all fulfil your considerable potential, we have suggested that all lessons should have the variety of pace and approach seen in the best, so that they capture your attention and actively involve and challenge you. You can help by having high expectations for yourself and stretching to achieve them.

I wish you and your school continuing success.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

29 February 2008

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I wish you and your school continuing success.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia Metham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector