

Walderslade Girls' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118814
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	358448
Inspection dates	16–17 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Angela Corbett HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	893
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pam Conibeer
Headteacher	Louise Smith
Date of previous school inspection	17 February 2011
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out at no notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 31 lessons taught by 30 different teachers, conducted four 'learning walks' into lessons, attended two tutorial sessions and visited one assembly. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff and two members of the governing body, and a telephone conversation was held with one parent. Joint meetings, with an additional inspector from the Greenacre School inspection team, were conducted with sixth form leaders from both schools. Inspectors also looked at a range of documentation including policies, data and analyses, records of the school's monitoring, the governing body minutes and questionnaires completed by 42 staff, 142 students and 232 parents and carers.

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

- The current attainment and quality of learning and progress for all students and in all subjects, in particular in mathematics and science.
- The quality of teaching and how well assessment is used to raise achievement, particularly for the more able and those with identified special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The impact of care, guidance and support on student outcomes.
- The extent to which senior and middle leaders are involved in rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation, and how well these promote strong outcomes equally for all students.
- The quality of provision and effectiveness of leadership and management of the joint sixth form in promoting strong outcomes for students attending from both schools. The quality of provision and effectiveness of leadership and management of the joint sixth form in promoting strong outcomes for students attending from both schools.

Information about the school

Walderslade Girls' is similar in size to other secondary schools. The school is located within an authority which operates a selective system and gained specialist status in the humanities with arts in 2008. Most students are from White British backgrounds and those few from other backgrounds represent all minority ethnic groups. A higher proportion than average have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and a much smaller proportion than is found nationally have statements of identified special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The school has a joint sixth form with the neighbouring boys' school, Greenacres, which has specialist status for sport and ICT. Students in the sixth form are taught on both sites in mixed classes. The school has Healthy Schools status, and has gained a number of awards, including Artsmark, Investors in Careers Quality Mark and the Inclusive Schools Quality Mark.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school where students achieve well. Students are proud of their school and the opportunities it offers, which is reflected in their high levels of attendance and the good progress made by the majority of students in most subjects. Since the last inspection, senior leaders have focused successfully on improving the attainment made by students at both Key Stages 3 and 4. As a result, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C has risen to above the national average, although attainment is broadly average when mathematics and English are included.

The school's specialist subjects are now making a strong impact across many aspects of school life. These areas include the promotion of community links, as a platform for improving students' literacy, and in developing their social, moral and ethical understanding. The good curriculum, which includes citizenship for all students, provides varied opportunities to ensure that the needs and interests of all students are met. Outcomes for students in the joint sixth form are good because of the effective management of the good-quality shared provision. Students appreciate the sixth form provision, as demonstrated by one student, who said, 'I don't think of it as having to be at school. I'm here because I enjoy it and I want to learn.'

Teachers have good subject knowledge and there are good relationships between staff and students, which support students' learning well. In some subjects, such as English and information and communication technology (ICT), teachers are particularly effective at identifying, either verbally or in writing, what each student needs to do to improve, but this approach is not used as effectively across all subjects. Students make greatest progress when they are able to participate actively in their learning, activities are fast paced and varied, are matched well to their individual needs and account is taken of differing learning styles. However, these features are not common to all lessons because good and outstanding practice is not shared consistently across the school.

The house system provides the main focus for students' good care, guidance and support. Students get on well together and develop good social skills. Most students say they feel safe in school and that staff deal promptly and effectively with any issues. The school takes students' safety very seriously, with good arrangements in place to secure their safety in lessons and around school, as well as on education visits. Students receive good guidance on a range of safety issues, including road and fire safety and safe use of the internet. The school provides parents and carers with appropriate information on students' progress, well-being and on a range of aspects of school life. However, it is not always successful at ensuring that parents and carers feel fully informed and that their views are taken into account.

A key factor in students' improved progress is the close tracking of their academic performance by subject, year and senior leaders. The new departmental 'audit' system is

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enabling middle leaders to take responsibility and be held to account for performance in their areas. They are supported well in this work by senior leaders. This approach contributes to accurate whole-school self-evaluation and shows there is good capacity for future improvement. However, development planning at all levels does not focus sharply enough on the full range of students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on current good practice to improve teaching so that it is consistently good and an increased proportion is outstanding, thus enabling the majority of students to make exceptional progress, by:
 - involving all students in active learning through a combination of whole-class, individual and group work
 - using a wide range of strategies that link and tailor learning more closely to students' individual learning styles and needs
 - making greater use of ICT in lessons to interest and involve students more in their learning
 - bringing greater consistency to assessment so that students are clear about how to improve within each subject through written and verbal feedback.
- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - increasing dialogue between home and school and taking greater account of parents' and carers' views
 - sharpening development planning at all levels by focusing closely on the intended outcomes for different groups of students by using measurable targets that can be regularly evaluated.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Most students are keen, determined to do well and trust that their teachers will help and guide them well. Behaviour is good in most lessons. Learning is best when tasks are interesting, practical, set in context or provide opportunities for students to work in groups or pairs, such as in dance and drama. During the inspection, for example, in a science lesson, students worked in groups dissecting a heart. Although they did not find this task easy, they were resilient in their approach and made rapid progress in identifying and understanding the different parts of the heart. In a mathematics lesson, when budgeting for a holiday, students made good progress because they could see the relevance of the task. Students' learning is slower when lessons are too teacher led or best use is not made of paired and group work.

Attainment on entry is lower than that found nationally because there are fewer who reach the higher Level 5. Since the last inspection, attainment by the end of Year 11 has risen steadily. It is now broadly average, with the proportion achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, close to the national average in 2010. This represents good progress overall for most students and is reflected evenly

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across all groups of students, including those whose circumstances may make them most vulnerable to underachievement and those with identified special educational needs and/or disabilities. Achievement in both English and mathematics has risen considerably since the last inspection because the quality of teaching has improved. Achievement is also improving in science where more students are studying for two GCSEs, rather than a single grade, as they have previously. Current school data and examination results indicate that the upward trend is set to continue.

Students make a good contribution to school life through their houses, by raising money for charity, for example, or participating in inter-house sports competitions. Many take on responsibilities by acting as peer mediators, school council members, prefects and sports captains. Some participate successfully in local competitions for speaking and listening. Students have a good awareness of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Some Key Stage 4 students recalled clearly their first lesson in food technology in Year 7 in which they made a salad, and say they have continued to learn much about healthy eating and other aspects of living a healthy lifestyle as they have moved through the school. Students develop an excellent understanding of a range of current ethical issues through debates in religious education. The expressive arts and specialist subjects contribute to developing their cultural understanding through lessons, and music and drama performances.

Students are well prepared for the next stage of their lives, developing good workplace and basic skills. As a result, almost all progress into the school's joint sixth form, further education, employment or training at the end of Year 11.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good. Sometimes, it is outstanding, but some inconsistencies in quality remain both in and across subjects. In the most effective lessons, teachers set high expectations and learning is well paced and matched to students' differing learning needs. Some teachers are skilful at supporting learning by developing subject language, providing appropriate worksheets or using questioning to help students progress and develop independence. ICT is used well in some lessons, enabling students to become confident users, although computerised whiteboards are not fully capitalised on to engage and interest students. Students' work is marked regularly by most teachers, and where pupils are given opportunities to assess their own and others' work, their progress accelerates because feedback is immediate. However, while some teachers provide exceptionally detailed and highly focused feedback to students on how to improve their work, this is not always the case. Provision for students requiring additional support for their pastoral and learning needs receive targeted help and effective support through the Additional Education Needs provision, known as 'AEN'.

Students follow a broad and balanced curriculum for the first three years. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is adapted well to meet the individual needs of students, by providing a good range of GCSE or BTEC courses. In many instances, it is highly personalised, for example some students in Year 11 spend one or two days each week in college or on extended work experience placements. As a result, their attendance, behaviour and

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engagement have improved. An outstanding feature of the curriculum is the promotion of careers, with all subjects contributing to raising students' aspirations and opening new horizons. Throughout the year, a good range of special days enhance and widen students' experiences, covering topics such as enterprise learning, raising the profile of science and promoting healthy eating in the 'you are what you eat' day. A reasonable range of extra-curricular activities are provided for students, many in the specialist area of the expressive arts. Citizenship lessons, assemblies and tutorial sessions contribute well to students' personal, social and health education. Students' progress files provide a valuable record of their tutorial work, which is both wide ranging and age-appropriate. In particular, a Year 9 unit of work on women's health is exceptionally well thought through.

Students belong to one of four houses, with heads of houses overseeing students' well-being. The pupils' progress managers are each responsible for monitoring the progress of students in one year group and quickly identify and tackle any underachievement. As a result of this two-pronged approach, students receive good care and support both within school and from outside agencies. However, in some instances, support is not sufficiently targeted or focused to meet all students' differing needs. Students receive good guidance for making choices in Year 9 and beyond Year 11.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have brought about a steady rise in attainment over the last three years as a result of their strong drive to raise achievement. Challenging targets are set for each student and progress is tracked rigorously, with well-planned and well-supported interventions wherever they are needed. Good attention has been paid to improving the quality of teaching through whole-school training. Teaching quality is routinely monitored, although this work is focused within departments and, as a result, good and outstanding practice is not always shared between subjects.

Good links with outside agencies and effective systems ensure the safety of students. Appropriate training is in place, policies are clear and records are well maintained. Equality of opportunity and attention to any discrimination has ensured that all groups, regardless of background, ability or educational need, make similar progress. However, while departments are expected to monitor and evaluate their own performance, the overarching picture is not always considered. Consequently, planning does not always focus enough on the impact of actions on students' achievement or always provide measurable criteria so that impact can be regularly evaluated.

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The governing body is supportive, and well informed through its close links with each department and involvement with self-evaluation. As a result, it is increasingly challenging the school about its performance and holding it to account. The school understands its context well and has put in place a wide range of actions to promote community cohesion. Many of these are linked with its specialism, particularly in terms of engagement with a range of groups within the locality. It recognises that it has yet to make a cohesive plan or fully evaluate the impact of its work across all aspects of community cohesion.

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

Sixth form

The number of students from both Walderslade Girls' and Greenacre Schools choosing to stay in the jointly managed sixth form is rising. This improvement reflects the increasing regard in which the joint provision is held, notably because the good curriculum is designed to meet the interests and abilities of students from both schools, with clear routes into both academic and applied courses. These factors, together with students' exceptionally high attendance, result in good outcomes for those from both schools. Attainment overall is close to or, in some courses, above the national average. Students' progress is improving year on year and is good overall. However, there is still some variation in achievement both within and between courses. Students enjoy sixth-form life, feel safe and are fully involved in the life of both schools, for example through their mentoring of and support for younger students. Their positive contribution to the wider community is also good and includes involvement in charity work and work in local primary schools. All students participate in the range of enrichment opportunities, which they have developed for themselves.

Students benefit from and appreciate the good teaching in both schools. Good use is made of staff expertise and resources across both schools, particularly in relation to their

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different specialisms. Good attention is given to improving students' literacy and study skills. However, while their independent learning is developing well, these skills are not always sufficiently promoted in all lessons. The helpful feedback provided by subject staff contributes to students' good learning.

Students receive good care and support in their tutorial groups, which are based in their respective original schools. Close monitoring of individual progress, attendance and punctuality ensures that appropriate support is given at critical times. Progression to university, employment and training is exceptionally high and well supported by good systems for providing guidance. The joint sixth-form leadership is good, and focused on evaluating and addressing any variations in performance through well-targeted actions.

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

When compared with the national average, the proportion of parents and carers who returned a questionnaire was high. Of those who responded, most agreed with the majority of the statements. Most parents and carers felt their children enjoy, and feel safe in school. However, a number of concerns were raised in the statements and through additional written comments. In particular, concerns were expressed about help to support their child's learning and to live a healthy lifestyle, about unacceptable behaviour and the extent to which the school listens and takes account of parents' and carers' views. Inspectors looked in detail at all of these issues. They took full account of the views of all parents and carers that were received, as well as a range of school evidence and the views of students. Inspection evidence showed that the school teaches students well about what they must do to live healthy lives. Students were found to be polite and courteous and behaviour was seen to be good in most lessons. However, inspection evidence found that there were missed opportunities to inform parents and carers and take greater account of their views when making decisions.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Walderslade Girls' School 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 232 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 893 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	67	29	136	59	20	9	4	2
The school keeps my child safe	75	32	140	60	10	4	5	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	86	37	117	50	24	10	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	64	28	149	64	11	5	5	2
The teaching is good at this school	56	24	144	62	20	9	5	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	16	134	58	41	18	7	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	8	155	67	46	20	6	3
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)	38	16	146	63	22	9	5	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	49	21	153	66	19	8	6	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	47	20	125	54	27	12	23	10
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	12	140	60	38	16	6	3
The school is led and managed effectively	65	28	141	61	16	7	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	71	31	138	59	13	6	7	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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 2009 to 31 August 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 2009/10 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.



18 February 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Walderslade Girls' School, Chatham ME5 0LE

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to let you know that we enjoyed the time we spent with you on our recent visit. We would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and sharing your views with us in meetings, lessons and around the school. We found Walderslade Girls' to be a good school. Here is a summary of our main inspection findings, although I hope that you will take the time to read the full report.

- You make good progress by the end of Year 11 and your attainment is now broadly average.
- The quality of teaching is good and you receive good guidance on how to improve, although this is not consistent across all lessons.
- Your attendance is high. Most of you enjoy school; in particular, you like dance and drama lessons and the facilities offered in the new dance studio.
- Your behaviour is good and you are keen to do well.
- The curriculum is varied and matched well to your interests and needs.
- The joint sixth form provision is good.
- Many of you make a good contribution to school life and the wider community, for example raising funds for charity or as school council members, prefects and sports captains.

Your senior leaders and other staff in the school are keen to improve it further. To help them with this, we have asked that senior leaders:

- improve teaching, so that it is consistently good and better, by building on the good practice of some teachers to ensure that you are all actively involved in your learning, activities are designed to meet your differing needs and more use is made of ICT to make lessons more interesting for you
- improve the communication between home and school, so that your parents and carers feel fully informed about your learning and school life
- improve school development planning so that any actions to bring about improvement are more closely linked to improving your academic and personal development outcomes.

All of you can help by making the most of opportunities offered to you, and being even more actively involved in your learning in lessons.

Yours sincerely

Angela Corbett Her Majesty's Inspector

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