

Gravesend Grammar School

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Unique reference number | 137099 |
| Local authority | N/A |
| Inspection number | 397465 |
| Inspection dates | 16–17 May 2012 |
| Lead inspector | Patricia Metham HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Academy converter |
| School category | Non-maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Boys |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1068 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 280 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Graham Ralph |
| Headteacher | Geoff Wybar |
| Date of previous school inspection | 6–7 July 2007 |
| School address | Church Walk Gravesend Kent DA12 2PR |
| Telephone number | 01474 331893 |
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Introduction

Inspection team

Patricia Metham

Her Majesty's Inspector

Richard Gadd

Additional inspector

Lesley Leak

Additional inspector

David Lewis

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 31 lessons, observed 31 different teachers, and held meetings with the chair of the governing body, staff and students. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection. They evaluated students' achievement over three years and reviewed schemes of work, policies, the school's self-evaluation and development plan and minutes of governing body meetings. They considered 470 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers, 217 responses to the students' questionnaire and 57 responses from staff.

Information about the school

Gravesend Grammar is a slightly larger than average, academically selective boys' school, with a relatively small intake of girls amongst students who join for their sixth form studies. In August 2011, the school converted to academy status. It is a Language College, has specialist status for mathematics and computing and is a Leadership School for the National College of School Leadership. The school exceeds the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

Just over one in four students belongs to a minority ethnic group; the largest group is of Indian heritage. About one in every ten in the school, a little below the national average, has English as an additional language. Many others are bilingual and do not speak English at home. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is small, but increasing, and the proportion currently on the school action plus programme or with a statement of special educational needs is very small.

Gravesend Grammar extends its sixth form provision through collaboration with other local secondary schools and with Kent University. It has an active outreach programme in six primary schools.

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 | 2 |
| Achievement of pupils | 2 |
| Quality of teaching | 2 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | 2 |
| Leadership and management | 2 |

Key findings

- This is a good and steadily improving school under the purposeful and persuasive leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders. Examples of outstanding practice are conspicuous in all areas. However, as senior leaders recognise, the school is not yet outstanding overall because teaching, while mostly good or better, does not ensure that students' ability to express their ideas in writing is as well developed as their mathematical skills. Accurate evaluation of strengths and of development priorities and the positive impact of recent strategies show strong capacity for further improvement.
- The sixth form is also good and steadily improving. Students' needs are understood and carefully supported; evidence of underachievement leads to prompt intervention. Sixth formers make a positive contribution to the school.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is rooted in the curriculum, linked to equality of respect and opportunity and actively promoted through a fine network of care and guidance. Students are keen to achieve and justifiably confident that their teachers will guide them to good results. They are courteous and cooperative and, in most lessons, attentive and responsive.
- Students' attainment on entry is above average. Results in most subjects at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are high, reflecting good progress overall. Achievement is especially impressive in mathematics. There are no significant differences in overall achievement by different groups.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning is systematic and effective. Most teaching is now good or better. Regular reviews of students' progress shape school planning and set priorities for the professional development of staff. Outstanding practitioners mentor and coach less consistently effective teachers.
- Safeguarding procedures are thorough and staff well trained. A confident sense of community is shared by staff, students and parents and carers.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that high expectations and consistently good or better teaching enhance students' ability to communicate complex arguments and shades of meaning in their writing.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is high and progress overall is good. Almost all students gain five or more A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics. Progress in English across Key Stage 3 has been slow but accelerates in Key Stage 4. Students are able to identify aspects of their work which have improved and explain how this has been achieved. Results in English improved in 2011, with those for whom English is an additional language outperforming other students. Attainment in mathematics is outstanding; in 2011 nearly three quarters of entrants gained A* or A at GCSE. Disabled students and those with special learning difficulties progress at a similar rate to their school contemporaries and significantly better than similar students nationally. Inspectors observed excellent progress in science. In a Year 10 class, for example, students worked with enthusiasm and skill on tests to determine the link between exercise and blood properties; they asked constructive questions and shared ideas productively.

Students' writing in a range of subjects and across all key stages, however, does not consistently communicate the level of thinking and expression heard in their contributions to discussion. This has an impact on the proportion of the highest grades achieved in subjects that require extended writing that is sophisticated and fluent.

In the sixth form, attainment is high in most subjects but recent results indicate weakness in a small number of subjects. The school's response has been well directed, with closely monitored interventions to support students at risk of underachievement and to ensure that the most able are fully challenged. Assessment of coursework has become more rigorous and accurate, giving a secure picture now of good progress. Changes to the timing and supervision of students' extended project work are ensuring that those with the commitment and capacity to do well continue with this option and submit work of a high quality.

Of the unusually large proportion of parents and carers responding to the questionnaire, almost all expressed well-justified confidence in their child's progress.

Quality of teaching

Key Stage 4 students identify their rapport with staff as a key strength, and sixth formers speak of teaching that is 'tailored to individual needs'. Inspection evidence

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supports the school's assessment that most but not yet all teaching is good or better. Strengths include: enthusiastically communicated subject knowledge; effective use of assessment to reinforce learning; the ability to capture students' interest and build their confidence; well-integrated support for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; encouragement of group work and peer- and self-assessment; confident use of varied resources; and the matching of activities to individual abilities and learning styles. In a Year 7 history class, for example, the challenge for students to mark on a world map places where conflicts occurred over the past 1000 years prompted lively debate and drew on wide-ranging prior knowledge. Practical strategies, such as approaches to questioning and the use of prompt sheets to support disabled students and those with special educational needs, are included in lesson plans and are well implemented. When appropriate, students have one-to-one support both in and out of classes.

In the relatively small number of less effective lessons there is: modest challenge for the most able; limited opportunity for students to show initiative and be independent learners; and inappropriate timing of activities, which leads to loss of focus among younger students.

Parents and carers echo inspection findings. They share students' appreciation of teaching overall, but a few comment on variations in its quality and impact. Most feedback is very positive, as the following illustrates. 'The teachers, from the headteacher onwards, provide an excellent learning environment for our son, through their hard work, professional skills and engagement with him.'

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are emphatic that they feel safe. They are aware of the different forms of bullying and describe bullying as 'very rare'. They are confident that problems will be dealt with quickly and efficiently, mainly by the student support team. Attendance by students in Key Stages 3 and 4 is above average, especially by those with English as an additional language. Rates are lower in the sixth form.

Students value the school's strength as a cohesive community. 'It's a shared feeling of acceptance for everyone.' Those in Key Stage 4 feel they benefit from single-sex education. 'It focuses your learning.' On the other hand, as they observed, the presence of girls in the sixth form is seen as a good thing for all concerned. About a quarter of those who completed the student questionnaire judged that behaviour is not always good, both in lessons and around the school. About one in five of the parents and carers expressed concern about distracting behaviour in lessons, but almost all were emphatic that behaviour overall is good. Inspection evidence shows that on the few occasions when teaching is less effective and the pace of lessons is slow, and tasks lack clarity or interest, younger students lose concentration and become distracted and distracting. This low-level disruption is never hostile and subsides as soon as the learning becomes more engaging.

Students in all key stages are friendly, courteous and helpful, keen to make progress

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and happy to support each other's learning. They welcome opportunities to take on responsibility. Sixth formers act as prefects, run sports activities for Key Stage 3, participate in the Gravesham Youth Council and work with primary school children.

Leadership and management

A clear and ambitious vision set by governors and the headteacher for the school's future as an outstanding resource for able boys from the surrounding community is shared at all levels. The school's well-managed conversion to academy status was driven by governors' conviction that it was 'the only opportunity to consolidate what we have and to reach out to other schools...We're very big into collaboration'. The governing body provides both strong support and rigorous challenge for the school. Financial management is disciplined and constructive.

Home-school collaboration is well established, as responses from parents and carers demonstrate. 'I feel my understanding of learning has evolved, for example through induction and the Year 8 languages' evening.' 'Any concerns I have shared with the school have been dealt with immediately, with a high level of professionalism and sensitivity.' Almost all agreed that the school helps them to support their children's learning, responds to their concerns and keeps them well informed. This makes an important contribution to the school's success in raising aspirations and driving up attainment. Students' safety and well-being are carefully protected, with staff training, health and safety issues and risk assessments regularly updated. Equality of respect and opportunity are promoted in practical ways as well as through the school's ethos.

The key targets set for teachers are to teach consistently well and to drive improvement in students' attainment and progress. Friday afternoons are dedicated to in-service training, which, as a head of school commented, 'makes professional development an integral part of the school'. Subject leaders are accountable for the quality of teaching and learning in their departments. The majority of teaching is now good or better. Led by the three heads of school, each responsible for a key stage, evaluation of students' attainment and progress is systematic and rigorous. Underachievement is quickly identified and well-targeted action taken, such as small-group teaching to strengthen literacy in Key Stage 3 and mentoring for individual students in Key Stage 4.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. Students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form appreciate their range of options, including opportunities to study courses off-site. A particular strength in Key Stage 3 is the creative arts programme (CREX), which encourages students to be inventive, try out new skills and collaborate imaginatively on mixed-media projects. There is a lively extra-curricular programme of clubs and activities, particularly in sport and the performing arts. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted through curriculum topics, visiting practitioners, trips to places of historical and cultural interest, and opportunities to experience other cultures and to undertake community service locally and abroad.

This view from a parent encapsulates the responses of many. 'The school treats the

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students with a respect and maturity that allow them to develop into fine young men, who can contribute constructively to society and make a difference to others less able.'

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 | 54 | 42 | 2 | 2 |
| Primary schools | 14 | 49 | 32 | 6 |
| Secondary schools | 20 | 39 | 34 | 7 |
| Special schools | 33 | 45 | 20 | 3 |
| Pupil referral units | 9 | 55 | 28 | 8 |
| All schools | 16 | 47 | 31 | 6 |

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Achievement: | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment. |
| Attainment: | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. |
| Attendance | the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance. |
| Behaviour | how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school. |
| Capacity to improve: | the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement. |
| Floor standards | the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures. |
| Leadership and management: | the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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: | inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. |
| 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. |
| Safety | how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning. |

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 May 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Gravesend Grammar School, Gravesend DA12 2PR

My colleagues and I greatly appreciated the friendliness and openness with which you showed us your work and answered our questions during our recent inspection. I am pleased to have this opportunity to tell you what we found.

Yours is a good school, which is well led and managed so that it is improving steadily in all it does. We were pleased to know that you feel safe at school and that you and your families are confident that you are well supported. You are justifiably proud of your school's results, especially in mathematics, and are right to give much of the credit to your teachers. You are keen to do well and they are committed to helping you fulfil your potential, which they have the knowledge and skills to do successfully. Most teaching is good or better. Occasionally, when a lesson does not keep you fully engaged – because the pace is slow or the teacher's explanations are long – some of you become restless, which makes it difficult for anyone to learn well. We know that your achievement in some subjects would be even better if you communicated your thoughts and feelings as effectively in your writing as you do in discussion. We agree with you that the curriculum meets your needs and extra-curricular events and activities provide you with an impressive range of opportunities.

To enhance your achievement and that of future students, we have asked your headteacher to ensure that:

- the ways in which you express complex ideas and shades of meaning in your writing are developed more effectively.

You can help by having high aspirations and continuing to work hard. The qualifications you achieve will equip you well for the next stage in your education or training.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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