

Sir William Borlase's Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136781
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	397479
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	Simon Rowe

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1028
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	375
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Whitehead
Headteacher	Peter Holding
Date of previous school inspection	5–6 February 2007
School address	West Street Marlow Buckinghamshire SL7 2BR
Telephone number	01628 816500
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Email address	enquiries@swbgs.com

Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	27–28 June 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Simon Rowe Additional Inspector

Peter Stumpf Additional Inspector

Sibani Raychaudhuri Additional Inspector

Heidi Boreham Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 37 lessons taught by 37 teachers. There were also a number of shorter visits to classrooms. Joint observations were carried out with the senior leadership team. Meetings were held with students, staff and members of the governing body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at documentation including the school's self-evaluation document, development plan, records of lesson observations, achievement data, and the latest attendance and exclusion figures. The inspection team also scrutinised questionnaires completed by 138 parents and carers, 150 students and 19 staff.

Information about the school

Sir William Borlase's Grammar School is a selective school of average size. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is very low, as is the proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. The school exceeds the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

Since the previous inspection, there have been some new members of the senior leadership team which has decreased in size overall. There is also a new Chair of the Governing Body. The school has received many awards including the Information and Communications Technology mark and Healthy Schools, Leading Edge and Investors in People status.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. The headteacher and his senior leadership team have the very highest expectations and have developed an inspirational learning culture which is embraced by staff and students. They have implemented a quality of learning initiative in their vision of ensuring teaching and achievement are of the very highest quality and that students take responsibility for their own learning.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Achievement, teaching, behaviour and leadership are all of a very high quality in the sixth form.
- Achievement is outstanding. The proportion of students who achieve A* and A grades is very high. Students made rapid and sustained progress in the lessons observed and in most subjects over time. Achievement in modern foreign languages is improving, but is not yet outstanding.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers plan and deliver learning experiences for students that enthuse them and also develop their independence. Students thrive on being challenged, take responsibility for their own learning and show great resilience and a determination to succeed.
- Exemplary behaviour makes a significant contribution to the outstanding quality of learning in lessons. Students are polite and courteous, and show a high level of respect to their teachers and each other and a passion for learning.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. The leadership of teaching has been instrumental in teaching and achievement being outstanding. Heads of department and key stages also provide outstanding leadership in their areas. Performance management is used to maintain high expectations. The curriculum provides rich and memorable opportunities for students and the range of extra-curricular activities is wide ranging. A few parents and carers did comment, rightly, that they felt communication between the school and home could be more effective so that they could fully support their child's progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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

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- Improve achievement in modern foreign languages to outstanding by 2013.
- Ensure communication with parents and carers is timely so that they can fully support their child's progress.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The school has invested much time in ensuring the highest levels of achievement through a focus on developing the quality of teaching. It has implemented a quality of learning initiative which is based around the principle of 'building learning power'. This involves a focus on pedagogy and ensuring that teachers plan for, and deliver, lessons which develop students' learning through independence, reflection, collaboration, reasoning and resilience. This initiative was both evident in teachers' planning and in the lessons the teachers delivered.

The school has also implemented a three-year Key Stage 4 programme which provides more flexibility about when students take their final examinations. For the most-able students some of these courses are run over two years which then enable students to commence AS level studies in Year 11. The school has raised students' aspirations though using the strapline 'personal best and not a B' to motivate them to achieve the higher grades of A* and A. There has been a concerted effort to develop literacy across all subjects, particularly with respect to boys, through planning the development of students' communication skills, highlighting key words and ensuring students give full answers to questions.

Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are significantly above the national average. The proportions of students attaining the higher grades of A* and A are high. Over 100 students took accelerated GCSE courses at the end of Year 10 and virtually all achieved an A*. The improvement in the proportions of students achieving A* and A grades has boosted Key Stage 4 outcomes; students make outstanding progress in most key subjects. Progress in modern foreign languages is improving but is not yet outstanding.

The school has very few disabled students or with special educational needs. These students achieve similarly to their peers in lessons and over time.

Students make the best progress in lessons when they have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and ideas independently, in pairs and in groups. They enjoy being challenged, and show resilience and a determination to succeed.

Quality of teaching

Much of the teaching observed by inspectors was outstanding. In lessons, the teacher acts more as a facilitator and the responsibility for learning is placed clearly

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on the students. Planning is thorough and provides a range of imaginative and challenging activities as well as developing students' literacy and communication skills. Students thrive when they can adopt problem-solving and investigation-based approaches and have opportunities to work independently, and collaboratively, to discuss and derive methods to solve complex problems. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use high-quality questioning to assess students' understanding and to deepen their learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson students were solving a problem on finding the shortest route to connect towns together. Excellent teaching provided them with some key points but then they worked in pairs to discuss what the shortest route was, the strategies needed to obtain the shortest route and then how they could apply this in more complex situations. Through this investigational approach, learning was outstanding and the students derived the basis of key mathematical concepts for themselves.

Teachers have very high expectations and ensure lessons proceed at a brisk pace. They model approaches to solve problems, giving students the key building blocks to enable them to succeed. They generate high levels of enthusiasm and creativity. Assessment is regular and thorough and students are very aware of their target levels, their current levels and what they need to do to improve. There is much peer and self-assessment which enables students to reflect on their progress and to understand fully their next steps. Information and communication technology is used very well to enhance learning and also to aid assessment. For example, in a history lesson the teacher was using a mobile phone to photograph students' work. He then uploaded the work to the whiteboard where students were able to assess each other's work and provide guidance on how to improve.

Parents and carers correctly believe their child is well taught and students agreed with this.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour and attitudes make an exceptional contribution to their learning. The students show incredibly high levels of respect to their teachers, visitors and each other. They are very proud of their school and exhibit courtesy, collaboration and cooperation in lessons and at social times. Relationships are key to the safe and positive learning environment that is created. Students show real passion for, and excellent attitudes to, their learning, enabling all to offer their thoughts and ideas and to take risks during lessons.

The school site is a calm, orderly and considerate environment. In student interviews that were held, students were highly positive about behaviour. Inspectors experienced no incidents of any disruption in lessons and students were always courteous to them by holding doors open and asking if they needed assistance. Incidents of bullying are rare and students have an acute awareness of different forms of bullying and know how to keep themselves safe. Post-16 students were observed gathered in seated areas during their free sessions, working together and discussing forthcoming modules of study. At social times, students interacted with

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each other positively and some gathered on the lawn to play croquet.

Attendance is high and persistent absence is low. Students are punctual to lessons and take a real pride in their school environment. A scrutiny of behaviour and exclusion records over time indicates that behaviour is outstanding. Most parents and carers and students were highly positive about behaviour in their questionnaire responses.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and his senior leadership team have shown a real determination to achieve excellence. They show great ambition for student outcomes, and lead by example. Self-evaluation is exceptionally rigorous and accurate.

There has been an uncompromising drive to ensure teaching is outstanding through the quality of learning programme. This has focused teachers' planning and delivery of lessons to ensure that they develop students' independence, resilience, reflection and perseverance. Professional development has been provided for all staff on this new initiative and it is also part of the induction process for new staff. Senior leaders have worked alongside middle leaders to develop their practice and middle leaders are now independent in their monitoring of the quality of teaching. Middle leaders meet regularly and chair these meetings on a rota basis. The chair commences the meeting by usefully sharing the best practice in their department and the first half of the meeting is dedicated to issues around improving teaching. The developments in teaching, along with the exceptional support and guidance given to students by the heads of key stage, are instrumental in achievement being outstanding. The school is in the process of developing associate senior leadership positions for middle leaders to have the opportunity to experience senior leadership and to develop their expertise further. Performance management is used effectively to maintain high standard of achievement and teaching. The school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination effectively as is evident through the outstanding achievement, behaviour and attendance.

The curriculum provides highly positive and memorable opportunities and experiences for students. The students recognise and value the vast array of extra-curricular opportunities that are available to them. The performing arts specialism is used across the curriculum to develop students' confidence and presentational skills. It also delivers content from other subjects through the medium of dance and drama to develop key concepts. For example, students produced a dance piece of work related to a unit of work around electricity in science, interpreting the way electrons move to generate electricity. Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are regular and highly effective. There are regular trips abroad, a thought for the week, opportunities for discussions around spirituality and beliefs and an impressive commitment to supporting charities. Students have opportunities to organise and lead many events which develop their independence and leadership skills. For example, they host a 'leadership conference' for student leaders from other schools, they have organised and led an 'ethics day' and they work alongside

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students lower down the school to help aid their academic and emotional development. There is also much involvement from the post-16 students in organising and running events for primary school students.

A large proportion of questionnaires received from parents and carers contained written responses. Most of these were positive and one parent commented, 'We would like to highlight the dedication of the staff in helping our child and her peers to achieve their potential in academic, personal development and extra-curricular activities. The time, effort and support go far beyond what one could reasonably expect.' The school does communicate regularly with parents and carers, although some parents and carers commented that communication could be timelier to enable them to support fully their child's progress.

The governing body has a thorough understanding of the school and the quality of teaching and achievement. It provides support to the headteacher as well as offering challenge where appropriate to ensure the best outcomes. The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements and give no cause for concern.

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.



29 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Sir William Borlase's Grammar School, Marlow SL7 2BR

Thank you for your help during the school's recent inspection and for taking the time to talk with us. I am writing to tell you about our main findings.

We judge your school to be outstanding. The headmaster and his senior leadership team have very high expectations of you, as do all leaders, managers and staff. There has been much work to develop how teachers deliver your learning and this means that you are able to take responsibility for your progress.

Your behaviour and attitudes to learning in lessons and around the school are outstanding. This is a key factor in your high levels of achievement and in the welcoming and safe environment that you have created.

This is what we have asked leaders and managers to do to improve the school further.

- Raise achievement in modern foreign languages to outstanding by 2013.
- Ensure communication with your parents and carers is timely so that they can fully support your progress.

You can all help by continuing to show an exemplary approach to your learning.

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Lead inspector

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