

Grays Convent High School

23 College Avenue, Grays, RM17 5UX

Inspection dates 11–12 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is above the national average.
- Teaching is good. The large majority of lessons provide engaging and interesting activities that help the pupils to make good progress.
- Pupils who need extra help to catch up are well supported. As a result, the gaps in attainment between different groups are closing.
- The development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills is good. Most pupils make at least good progress in these areas.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well and are very keen to learn. They feel safe and there is a very prominent culture of respect throughout the school.
- Pupil's spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is promoted very effectively, both in the classroom and beyond it.
- Leaders and governors know the school well. They understand its strengths and weaknesses and have taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching and achievement of the pupils.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding and some requires improvement.
- Teachers do not always set tasks that are well matched to individual needs and this slows down progress for some pupils.
- When marking work, teachers do not always give pupils enough guidance on how to improve or expect them to respond to their advice.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons or part lessons, of which 10 were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Meetings were held with a wide range of staff, including the headteacher, senior leaders and middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 30 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 44 responses to the staff questionnaire during the inspection.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school's summary of its strengths and weaknesses, records of pupils' progress, other monitoring records and safeguarding documentation.

Inspection team

David Talbot, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Martin Dale

Additional Inspector

Kanwaljit Singh

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is smaller than the average-sized voluntary aided secondary school.
- More than half of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above that found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority and those who have a parent in the armed forces, is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below that found nationally. The proportion supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- A small number of pupils attend off-site provision at the Turn Around Centre, run by the Thurrock Excellence Trust.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum levels expected for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by:
 - sharing the good practice that exists more widely
 - making better use of information on pupils' prior learning to plan lessons and activities that match work to pupils' capabilities and enable them to make outstanding progress
 - ensuring that marking and assessment always give the pupils very clear guidance on how to improve, and that pupils act on the advice they are given.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils mostly join the school with attainment that is broadly similar to national averages. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is above average. Although this has slowly declined over recent years, the attainment of pupils in the current Year 11 is above average and a marked improvement on 2012. Pupils' attainment in some subjects, including design and technology, English literature, English, geography, religious education and science, was high in 2012.
- The proportion of pupils making or exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics compares favourably with national figures.
- Pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs make at least good progress. Where support is very closely targeted to the needs of the individual pupil, that progress is outstanding, as seen in an early morning literacy intervention session for pupils from all year groups.
- Funded by the Year 7 catch-up premium, good support for pupils who join the school with attainment below Level 4 in English enables them to make rapid progress.
- The school has a policy of not entering pupils early for GCSE examinations.
- The school is very successful at promoting reading, and a large number of books are borrowed from the school library, mainly fiction. There is a fortnightly library lesson throughout Key Stage 3 and pupils are encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities relating to reading, including the Carnegie Shadowing scheme, where pupils read and discuss all the books shortlisted for this year's children's literature award.
- Parents and carers who expressed a view were very positive about the progress their children are making and the information they receive about their children's progress.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium to provide one-to-one support and a range of other interventions to help pupils make progress. The gap between these pupils and their peers is equivalent to one GCSE grade and is closing slowly. It is, however, closing more rapidly in English than in mathematics.
- The school has made good use of the additional teaching time given to English and mathematics this year. However, less additional time has been given to mathematics at Key Stage 3, and the evidence suggests that progress is slower at that stage, particularly for the more-able pupils.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good overall, and there are examples of outstanding teaching in a range of subjects. Inspectors observed outstanding teaching in art, design and technology, history, languages and physical education.
- Very positive relationships encourage both high levels of motivation and commitment from the pupils. They want to participate and they want to learn.

- The large majority of teachers have high expectations of their pupils and what they are able to achieve. In the best lessons, teachers allow the pupils to explore ideas independently, something which the pupils clearly enjoy doing.
- Pupils work with one another sensibly and to very good effect. They clearly relish opportunities to do this and thrive in lessons that allow it to happen. In a history lesson, the pupils discussed a number of alternative solutions to problems faced by the Weimar Republic in Germany. They made decisions, justified them and then challenged each other in a mature and confident way.
- Literacy is promoted well. Pupils confidently use key terms in a number of subjects. In addition, speaking and listening are used to very good effect in a number of lessons and pupils are helpfully reminded of the importance of using Standard English.
- Other adults are used well to support the learning and progress of pupils who need additional support. This support helps these pupils to make good progress.
- Where teaching requires improvement, it is often because the teacher has not taken enough notice of each pupil's previous learning to plan lessons that allow all pupils to make rapid progress. Sometimes, every pupil is expected to complete the task in the same way and in the same period of time, no matter what her own learning needs might be.
- In less successful lessons, teachers sometimes limit what the pupils are able to achieve by keeping very tight control over every aspect of the lesson.
- The quality of assessment and feedback is variable across subjects and within subjects. The best feedback offers pupils clear guidance on how to improve, and expect pupils to respond to the advice given, but this is not always the case.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of the pupils is consistently outstanding, and their attitudes to learning are exemplary. In lessons they are attentive, self-disciplined and sustain concentration.
- Some very good examples of peer- and self-assessment were seen, such as in art, design and technology and an English lesson in Year 10, where pupils were asked to comment on and score a group presentation by their peers.
- Relationships between different members of the school community are a notable strength, and there is an overwhelmingly positive atmosphere in the school. Pupils are polite and courteous to each other and to adults. The culture of the school is such that pupils respect the diversity that exists both within it and beyond.
- Pupils feel safe at school and say that bullying is very rare but when it does occur it is sorted out quickly. Pupils' understanding of different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying, is very well developed.
- Attendance is consistently above average. There are very good systems in place to monitor attendance, and the school keeps a careful eye on the attendance of different groups of pupils, as well as that of individuals.

- The vast majority of parents or carers responding to Parent View agreed that their children are safe at the school and behaviour is well managed.
- Pupils generally regulate their own behaviour well. Where staff need to manage pupils' behaviour, it is done swiftly and effectively. The number of pupils excluded for poor behaviour is low and the school makes very good use of alternative provision to offer short-term support for pupils at risk of exclusion.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and those areas that require further development. There are well-focused plans in place and these are helping to drive up standards further.
- There is an effective system for managing the performance of teachers. Teachers have targets that reflect the school's priorities, as well as their own level of responsibility and development needs. Each teacher's performance is monitored and there are clear links to pay progression. Teachers are supported and challenged to improve the quality of their teaching and a range of professional development opportunities is provided to help them make that improvement.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because, although there is a focus on improving the quality of teaching across the school and pupils' achievement is improving, there is still further progress to be made. School leaders at all levels have the capacity to bring this about.
- The curriculum is good and offers an appropriate mix of academic and vocational courses at Key Stage 4. Recent changes to the school day and time allowed for English and mathematics have helped to make the curriculum reflect the needs and aptitudes of the pupils. There are additional opportunities for pupils to study languages, such as Polish, Italian and German, outside the school day.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is a particular strength. The values and beliefs of the school are evident in lessons and in the large number of very attractive displays in corridors. Pupils are given opportunities to develop leadership skills, such as through the prefect system, which is used very effectively to support the calm and purposeful atmosphere that prevails. The pupils value the very wide range of extra activities that are offered outside the normal school day.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils, including checks on the attendance of pupils at alternative provision, meet statutory requirements.
- The school has a good relationship with the local authority, which offers helpful support and advice to senior, subject and other leaders.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have developed a good balance between support and challenge. They understand how the school operates and ask appropriate questions of school leaders regarding the school's performance. They actively monitor the work of the school through looking at performance data, visits to the school and regular updates from the headteacher. Governors have received training to help them fulfil their role more effectively and this has been beneficial. They understand the system for managing the performance of teachers and how

decisions about pay progression are made. Governors have a good understanding of how the pupil premium funding is used and the impact it is having. They receive regular updates on the school's finances so that they are able to ensure that the school's funds are used wisely.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	115239
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	412240

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	586
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Sutton
Headteacher	Anne-Marie Brister
Date of previous school inspection	13 March 2008
Telephone number	01375 376173
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