

# Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School

Old Dover Road, Canterbury, CT1 3EW

**Inspection dates** 3–4 July 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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.

- Students make outstanding progress in Years 7 to 11 and attain well-above-average standards in GCSE examinations.
- Students mature into thoughtful young adults with the confidence to face whatever challenges they meet in their futures.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students value their personal and social education lessons highly.
- Students feel safe and happy at school. The school's care and support for their personal development are outstanding. New students in Years 7 and 12 settle in very quickly.
- Teachers have superb subject knowledge and often use this to make lessons intellectually challenging and stimulating.
- Students work hard and conscientiously. They are attentive, interested and learn well.
- The sixth form is good. The number of students moving on to prestigious universities has increased in the last few years.
- The activity of completing an extended project, (worth the same points as an AS level) in the sixth form is popular. Students gain much from undertaking the research and writing required for this qualification.
- Students' behaviour is exemplary. They are very keen to learn. They make the most of everything the school offers outside lessons.
- The curriculum includes outstanding enrichment activities which broaden students' horizons, give them useful skills for their future lives and encourage volunteering.
- The restructured senior leadership team, supported by middle leaders, is now tackling any underachievement and less successful teaching with determination. It is well supported by an experienced governing body.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In several subjects, sixth-form students do not make enough progress to attain their full potential and to achieve the top AS- and A-level grades.
- Senior and middle leaders did not deal with underachievement in the sixth form energetically enough in the past.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 42 part lessons, one of which was jointly observed with the headteacher. Inspectors observed an assembly and form times.
- As GCSE and sixth-form examinations had finished, inspectors could not see any lessons in Years 11 and 13. They met students from both these years and several other groups as well.
- Inspectors held meetings with members of the senior leadership team, leaders in charge of subjects and other aspects of the school's work, other staff with positions of responsibility and the Vice Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors discussed lessons they had seen with teaching staff and examined a range of documents, including the school's own evaluation of its work, improvement plans and data about progress, standards, exclusions, attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors looked at a range of students' work within and outside lessons.
- Inspectors took into account 104 parents' responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire. Several parents contacted the school during the inspection to say that they were unable to access the online questionnaire. Inspectors also took into account 43 questionnaires completed by members of staff.

## Inspection team

Clare Gillies, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
John Meinke	Additional inspector
Janet Morrison	Additional inspector
Jason Wye	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is a little larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school takes boys in the sixth form. There are many more girls than boys in the sixth form.
- About 85% of students are White British, with small percentages of girls and boys in the sixth form from many different minority ethnic backgrounds.
- An average proportion of students speak English as an additional language, very few of whom are at an early stage of learning English.
- A well-below-average proportion of students receive support through the pupil premium, which provides additional government funding for specific groups, including looked-after children and students known to be eligible for free school meals. The school has a tiny number of looked-after children.
- No students are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up funding.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is well below the national average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also well below the national average. The most common needs relate to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- The school does not use any alternative, off-site education provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher is a National Leader of Education and has been chair of the East Kent Association of Headteachers for the past year.
- The school was designated as a National Teaching School in March 2014 and awarded Artsmark Gold for the fourth time in 2013.
- Since September 2012, in a collaborative partnership, the headteacher has been executive head of the local Spires Academy a school for 11 to 16-year-old students.
- The school takes a lead role in the Canterbury Collaborative Partnership. This is a teaching and learning collaboration involving one other secondary school, nine primary schools and one special school.
- The school was awarded Investors in Careers Gold for the third time in 2013.
- The school promotes STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) activities.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve rates of progress in the sixth form so that more students achieve or exceed their target grades and attain more high AS- and A-level grades by:
  - making sure senior leaders regularly analyse data on students' progress to identify and tackle any underachievement as early as possible
  - ensuring leaders check that teachers in all subjects assess students' standards and progress accurately
  - extending into the sixth form the best practice in high-quality teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11
  - checking that all the priorities to improve students' work habits are in place by September 2014.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students attain very high GCSE grades which are in the top 20% of national results. AS- and A-level results are also well above average in practically all the subjects taken. Sixth-form students completing the extended project qualification achieve extremely well; their results are in the top 25% of schools nationally.
- The percentage of students attaining five GCSE grades at A\* to C including English and mathematics has been at least 95% for several years. In the majority of GCSE subjects, over 50% of students attain A\* and A grades. Very high percentages attain these top grades in the sciences and several other subjects. The most able students achieve extremely well in Years 7 to 11.
- Students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language do at least as well as others and make exceptionally good progress, particularly in Years 7 to 11. The very small number of students with special educational needs make the same progress as similar students do nationally.
- In 2013, the very few students eligible for additional funding attained almost exactly the same GCSE grades as other students in mathematics, and about half a GCSE grade lower in English; both gaps narrowed in 2013. These students made even better progress in mathematics than others but slightly less than others in English.
- Almost all students read and write very well and spell accurately. These skills, combined with high levels of numeracy, support work in other subjects. About two thirds of Year 11 students attain A\*/A grades in GCSE mathematics. The school has not entered students early for GCSE.
- In recent years, too many sixth-form students have not achieved the AS- or A-level grades predicted by their GCSE results. For example, in 2013, nine students who had attained A\* GCSE grades in all three science subjects achieved a B grade or lower in A-level chemistry. Close to 20 students did not achieve their predicted grades in A-level psychology. However, there are several sixth-form subjects in which students' progress in the last four years has been consistently good.
- Initiatives introduced in 2012/13 resulted in a higher percentage of top grades at A level and improved progress at AS level. The school's predictions suggest that this better achievement will be reflected at AS and A level in 2014.
- The school actively promotes students' involvement in creative subjects such as drama, music or art: achievement in these areas is excellent. The school's sport teams regularly do very well in competitions, for example, reaching the Kent athletics final in 2014.

### The quality of teaching

is good

- Practically all subject leaders and many teachers generate consistently good, and often outstanding, learning. Students contribute to this by collaborating and helping each other very well when they work together.
- Students are well motivated to get the most out of lessons. Their interest in learning is further engaged, for example, by teachers using well-selected, stimulating video clips, pictures or quotations which are relevant to the topic being studied. Encouraging students not to take such resources at face value extends their critical thinking skills most effectively.
- Learning is also particularly successful, for example, when teachers:
  - ensure that most students, not just those who put their hands up, answer questions
  - give extremely clear explanations of methods to use such as for mathematical calculations or scientific investigations
  - mark students' work with detailed and constructive comments about how it can be improved

- give students, especially the most able, particularly challenging work or guide them to other sources such as those on the internet or the school's virtual learning environment.
- English teachers have intensified their focus on improving students' essay-writing skills. Sixth-form students' technical skills are improving. Teachers in other subjects regularly use subject-specific vocabulary and check students' understanding of key words. Science and other subject teachers exploit and strengthen students' excellent numeracy skills.
- The very few students speaking English as an additional language who need help to strengthen their fluency in English receive intensive and effective support. When necessary, teachers adapt work well for the small number of students with special educational needs.
- Several sixth-form routines and procedures, which have now changed, contributed to some students' progress being less than expected based on their starting points. In some subjects, teachers and subject leaders have not always graded progress very accurately or identified underachievement early enough to turn it around quickly.
- In addition, not all teachers and subject leaders have managed to extend and develop the often vibrant and successful learning seen in Years 7 to 11 into their sixth-form lessons. For example, teachers sometimes give students too little time to think about problems and discuss them before giving an answer or do not check their understanding is secure at key points during lessons.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. At break and lunchtimes the few staff around rightly know that students will be sensible and thoughtful and will respect the environment. Attendance is well above average and fixed-term exclusions are very rare.
- In all years, the great majority of students present their work well and keep their notes well organised. They have excellent relationships with teachers which contribute to their consistently good, and often outstanding, learning. Students are polite and most welcoming to visitors.
- When evaluating each other's work, for example in art or written work, students are considerate and thoughtful. They get on extremely well together and the atmosphere around the school fosters excellent relationships. Students know that the promotion of equality of opportunity has a high profile and that discrimination is not tolerated.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Well-planned learning in personal and social education and religious education includes many social and moral issues which are discussed sensitively. Students are unanimously confident that bullying does not happen. They are fully aware of different types of bullying, such as homophobic bullying, and of the potential dangers of social media and other internet sites.
- Examples of enrichment activities, often within the local community, include students sharing their writing for young children with primary schools, researching approaches to understanding eating disorders or entertaining care-home residents at Christmas. Enrichment activities in the sixth form include useful areas such as managing money or first aid.
- A parent wrote that 'the school has found the right balance between pupils settling in to a new environment and having to respond to new and exciting academic demands'. The school rightly prides itself on helping girls to enjoy school life as well as working hard. The few students with special educational needs receive high-quality support.
- Students develop excellent leadership skills by keenly taking on roles of responsibility. Whether leading sports teams, becoming prefects, supporting younger students, running clubs or fund raising, students relish the challenges these roles require and tackle them enthusiastically.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The senior leadership team has experienced several changes of personnel since the experienced headteacher took up post. The team is now well structured with effective deputy and assistant headteachers who have clear lines of responsibility.

- Staffing is stable and morale is good. Teachers say that they feel well supported. One wrote, 'I absolutely love my job.'
- Middle leaders are keen to make the teaching of their subjects as effective in the sixth form as it is in the main school. A slight drop in A-level English literature results in 2013 led to more time being allocated to teach coursework skills. Staff in mathematics are considering whether adaptations are needed to match sixth-form boys' preferred ways of working.
- Teachers' appraisals are linked to their salaries. In the past, where there has been underperformance, staff have been supported to improve their practice and held to account rigorously. Some staff improved their teaching and a few chose to leave.
- Senior leaders are slightly generous in their checks on the quality of teaching as they have not always made students' progress the key focus. Developing teaching is rightly the key priority in the school's plans for the future but improving it in the sixth form is not highlighted well enough.
- Nevertheless, senior and middle leaders know that sixth-form achievement is not where it should be. Some of the actions introduced in the last 18 months generated signs of improvement, while some did not. Following an internal review completed in March 2014, senior leaders, with middle leaders' support, have identified the correct priorities, especially to improve students' work habits. They are to:
  - abandon 'flexibility' whereby students could leave school if they did not have a lesson
  - organise supervised, private study times which students must attend
  - make all tutors responsible for supporting students who lack a strong work ethic
  - increase the number and accuracy of assessments of students' progress and sharpen up the response to the analysis of the information gathered from assessments.
- Once a fortnight, most year groups have a STEM activity session, for example, an exciting 3D-printing project. In recent years the number of students studying STEM-related subjects at university has increased. At the same time, over 90 of the Year 9 students work towards an art award, reflecting the school's equally strong commitment to creativity. This is also seen in the high-quality musical, dramatic and dance productions.
- The school organises numerous field trips and visits in the United Kingdom and overseas. The range of extra-curricular activities, many organised by sixth formers, is enormous. Some activities support university-level work for students, for example, for those who are gifted in languages and wish to study Greek, have high level mathematical skills or are keen on debating.
- High-quality careers advice ensures that students who leave at the end of Year 11 or later have their education or training futures organised. Comprehensive support for university applications is a strength. Retention rates into the sixth form from Year 11 fluctuate between 60% and 80% as some girls are attracted to other schools, but the movement is a two-way process.
- Regularly each week, teachers either work in departments or receive training on relevant topics such as young people's mental health. Staff with outstanding teaching practice share their expertise with others, but this has not focused on sixth-form teaching enough in the past.
- Collaboration with other secondary and primary schools is mutually beneficial and supports the school's extensive work in the community well. The school has good relationships with parents and helps them to support their children's learning.
- The local authority provides helpful support for the school and is fully aware that the drive to raise sixth-form achievement needs to gather momentum.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Members of the governing body bring a wealth of relevant experience in education and other professions to their work. Many visit the school regularly and combine challenge and support effectively when working with senior leaders.
  - Governors understand that the school's GCSE results are better than those in the sixth form, know about the quality of teaching and learning, and are fully involved with staff appraisal procedures and outcomes, including the award of any pay rises.
  - The school's website does not have the latest examination results nor evaluation of how effectively additional funds were spent, and will be spent, for the very few eligible students. This is considered by one of the governors' committees. Governors ensure that policies are up

to date and that safeguarding and child protection procedures are fully in place.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	118840
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	444373

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Grammar (selective)
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1089
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	265
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ash Rehal
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jane Robinson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15–16 May 2007
<b>Telephone number</b>	01277 463711
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