

Gordon's School

Bagshot Road, West End, Surrey, GU24 9PT

Inspection dates 12–13 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The work of this outstanding school is built upon a culture of high expectations and care for the individual. Students of all abilities and backgrounds make rapid progress from their starting points.
- The academic standards attained by students are very high. The proportion of students achieving five GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics is well above average.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good and often outstanding. Students are very enthusiastic about their learning because of this. Regular homework is used very effectively to promote their progress.
- Across a range of subjects teachers plan lessons well to extend students' knowledge and prepare them for examinations. Opportunities for teachers to share good ideas with each other and with other schools are at an early stage of development.
- Development of the personal skills of hard work, self-discipline and tolerance within strong Christian values and beliefs is a particular strength of this school. The result is that students are prepared exceptionally well to take their place in modern democratic Britain.
- Students' behaviour both within lessons and at other times is impeccable. There is a harmonious atmosphere within which students work conscientiously and collaboratively. They are extremely proud of their school; its ethos and traditions are greatly respected by all.
- The arrangements for keeping students safe and secure in the school are outstanding. They feel safe within a strong community and their sense of belonging is enhanced by regular participation in ceremony.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students make excellent progress and achieve high academic standards. They take advantage of a wide range of opportunities to develop leadership skills and the vast majority go on to secure places in higher education.
- The headteacher is ambitious for the school and its students, relentlessly pursuing the motto of 'understated excellence' in all areas. He is supported strongly by senior leaders who share his vision for developing the school.
- The governing body knows the school very well. Governors are highly qualified, self-evaluative and effective in skilfully shaping the strategic direction of this heavily oversubscribed school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 36 part-lessons. Three of these were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed and spoke with students during lessons, at break times and at lunchtime. They also met formally with groups of students from Key Stages 3, 4 and 5.
- Inspectors also looked at examples of students' work in lessons and during discussions with students.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers responsible for subject areas, teachers responsible for pastoral care, the chaplain, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors.
- The lead inspector also spoke with the school's independent 'Overview Partner' who advises the school on its development.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents expressed in 213 submissions to the online questionnaire (Parent View). In addition, inspectors took account of the school's own survey of parents and staff.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, information on students' current progress, monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, minutes of governing body meetings and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Paul Williams, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kanwaljit Singh

Additional Inspector

Diana Osagie

Additional Inspector

Gillian Keevill

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Gordon's School converted to become an academy on 1 January 2013. When the predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The school is a non-selective, state boarding school which offers boarding and day places for boys and girls aged 11 to 18 years.
- The boarding facilities were judged to be outstanding when they were inspected by Ofsted in February 2013.
- The school is supported by The Gordon Foundation, an independent charitable trust established in 1885.
- The school is slightly smaller than most secondary schools.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority) is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is 13.7% which is below average.
- Most students are of White British heritage. Small proportions of students are from Chinese, Indian or White and Asian ethnic backgrounds.
- The school offers alternative provision for a very small number of students in Years 10 and 11 within the Surrey Heath Area Partnership for Education, a local network of providers. These include Collingwood College, Kings International College for Business and the Arts, and Tomlinscote School.
- The school has recently joined the Salesian School Teaching Alliance as a strategic partner.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum levels expected for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend and develop the links that the school has with other schools and institutions so that teachers have more opportunities to deepen their own professional skills and provide help and advice to others.
- Strengthen the link between the support given to students through their houses and the academic support given to them in subject departments.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher provides strong leadership. He has been successful in developing the practices of the school while remaining always faithful to its founding characteristics. As a result leaders at all levels have been inspired and empowered.
 - Improvement planning is based on an accurate understanding of the school's provision and is sharply focused on raising the achievement of students. A recent, successful initiative to increase the rate of progress of students in English demonstrates the leadership team's effectiveness in bringing about change when required. There is a continual drive to improve the quality of teaching; involvement with organisations such as the Prince's Teaching Institute, which promotes excellence in teaching, demonstrates this commitment.
 - A programme of professional development which is designed to help staff at all stages in their careers to improve their work has recently been initiated. As part of this, the school is looking beyond its own boundaries to work with other schools and institutions in the local area, nationally and internationally to share skills and expertise. For example, it has recently joined a local group, the Salesian School Teaching Alliance, as strategic partner. The intention is to offer a comprehensive range of career development pathways to all staff.
 - Subject leaders are keenly aware of the performance of students and use assessment data well to intervene and help individuals when they most need it. They constantly monitor the quality of teaching in their departments and report that they are both challenged and supported by senior leaders.
 - The deployment of the pupil premium is managed well and has a marked impact on the performance of students. The fact that parents are involved in decisions about how the money is spent is a strong feature of the school's strategy. The majority of the funding is used to provide individual tuition for students in subjects where they need extra help.
 - There is a strong Christian ethos which is expressed through regular services in the chapel and the work of a chaplain who knows the school well and works with all parts of the community. Tolerance and respect for others are in evidence throughout the school. 'Insight talks', where inspirational speakers from outside of the Gordon's community are invited to make presentations, help students develop a broad, well-rounded view of the world. Students report that discrimination of any sort is extremely rare and is not tolerated.
 - The curriculum offers academic challenge which promotes and sustains a love of learning. Standards in science and mathematics are particularly high and form a good basis for further study in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. The curriculum was reviewed last year and by rearranging the school day, extra time for learning was made available. Some new GCSE subjects such as photography have been introduced, broadening the choice available.
 - A very wide range of sports, languages and creative activities are available for all students during 'Period 7' after the end of the formal school day. In addition programmes such as the Combined Cadet Force and Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme are taken up by over 90% of the students. These encourage teamwork, social skills and leadership. Sixth form students are integrated well into these programmes. One teacher expressed the view that 'an unbelievably broad experience is on offer to students at Gordon's'.
 - Vocational courses are provided for a small number of students through the Surrey Heath Area Partnership for Education. Four students currently take courses at Collingwood College, Kings International College for Business and the Arts or Tomlinscote School. The progress of these students is monitored well by teaching assistants who liaise with these alternative providers.
 - Careers advice and guidance begin in Year 7 and build through the school leading to a good awareness of the skills and vocabulary needed to be successful in the employment market. Consultant advice is used in Year 9 for GCSE choices. Students report that they are confident in the advice and guidance they have received.
 - The policies and procedures for safeguarding are robust and effective.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Governors understand the strengths of the school well and the challenges it faces. They are aware of the quality of teaching in different areas and its impact on the performance of different groups of students including those who are eligible for additional funding. They have a good understanding of performance data and they are able to compare the school to others nationally. A good level of challenge ensures that there is a healthy and constructive relationship with the headteacher and senior leaders. Governors are fully supportive of the headteacher's continual drive for improvement and

understand their role in ensuring rigorous performance management systems are in place for all staff, including the headteacher, which link performance to salary progression.

- Governors draw on their considerable expertise in different fields as they lead the strategic direction of the school. They communicate well with The Gordon Foundation which supports the school. Good systems are in place to ensure that financial resources are well managed. They also ensure that staff and students are kept safe and that safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.
- A recent self-evaluation exercise demonstrates the openness and commitment of the Chair of the Governing Body to lead a well-informed and well-trained group.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is impeccable. Students in all years show a great respect for their teachers and this results in calm, orderly lessons where learning is able to flourish. A particular strength is the willingness of students to support each other's learning in class and during supervised homework. Low-level disruption is extremely rare.
- Students behave extremely well around the school site. Litter is very rarely seen and the buildings and facilities are treated with great respect. The attitude of the students is exemplified by the pride that was shown during the inspection for the recently restored monument to General Gordon, a bronze statue prominently sited in the school grounds.
- There are very few incidents of serious misbehaviour and as a result the proportion of students who receive fixed-term exclusions is very small and well below the national average. There have been no permanent exclusions.
- Students respond very well to the culture of this school and contribute to it enthusiastically. For example, the whole school takes part in a ceremonial marching band parade once per week. Students embrace this and say that it helps them develop self-discipline and teamwork.
- Students demonstrate a high level of respect for each other. They report that incidents of racist, homophobic or other types of bullying are very rare and when they do occur they are dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. Students who join the school in Year 12 say that they are welcomed into the school community warmly and quickly.
- Sixth form students take their responsibility to act as positive role models seriously. Their appearance is smart and their attitudes are mature. Their presence guides the behaviour of younger students and so, for example, any incidents of racist or homophobic language are very rare.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- There is good communication between the school and the other schools where a very small number of students are studying vocational qualifications. Their attendance and behaviour are monitored closely and they are kept safe at all times.
- There is an appropriate system for checking and monitoring visitors to the site. Unexpected visitors arriving or those who arrive very early, for example, are challenged by the site team.
- Students understand and can describe what constitutes an unsafe situation and they are very clear about how to keep themselves safe. Through an effective programme of assemblies and personal, social and health education lessons they are well aware of a range of risks relating to, for example, e-safety, substance misuse, radicalisation and extremism.
- Attendance is above average because students value what the school is offering them and enjoy the experience. At the start of the school day and at the start of lessons through the day students arrive promptly. They are challenged to explain themselves robustly on the rare occasions that they are not on time.
- Sixth form students are subject to stringent checks on their punctuality, introduced by senior leaders this year. They are responding positively to this greater level of monitoring and for most students punctuality has improved as a consequence.
- The vast majority of parents agree that their child is kept safe at school and is happy. Virtually all parents express the view that they would recommend this school to others.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- As a result of teaching that is consistently good and often outstanding students learn extremely well in lessons and make sustained progress over time.
- Teachers have high expectations of all students. As a result students of all abilities, including the most able, disabled students and those with special educational needs and disadvantaged students, are making excellent progress. Teachers ensure that no students are allowed to fall behind.
- Teachers insist on high quality work and behaviour and this has resulted in a culture of excellence and scholarship. Students rise to this challenge, it generates enthusiasm and spurs them on to do their best. This is especially true in mathematics. This level of challenge is a feature of lessons in Year 7 to Year 9 and consequently the pace of learning is just as great in these lessons as in examination classes.
- Students' learning is well planned and features imaginative use of materials and resources to stimulate students' interests.
- The school is taking action to promote literacy across all subjects by, for example, gathering information about students' reading habits and encouraging all students to read widely. During the inspection students were observed to read well, write clearly and engage in conversation very articulately. Students' mathematical skills are well developed.
- Homework is used very effectively throughout the school. The system of supervised homework carried out at school in the evening is a major strength. It strongly promotes the progress of all those students who take up the option.
- There is a policy of providing detailed written feedback to students on their work every three weeks. These 'tri-weekly' comments, combined with regular testing, ensure that students know how to improve their work. The quality and depth of written feedback in art are exemplary.
- Because students' progress is assessed regularly and accurately, teachers know their abilities well. They use this information to plan work which is matched closely to students' earlier achievements and challenges them at the right level. Support for students in their houses would be strengthened if co-ordinated more fully with the knowledge about students' academic progress which is held by subject teachers.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to work with individuals and small groups of students. They get to know them well and as a result they are able to provide useful feedback to parents each half term.
- Teachers model a passion for learning and display excellent subject knowledge. They are skilled in the practice of questioning and use it both to assess learning and arouse inquisitiveness among students which inspires them to want to know more.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students start at the school with skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics that are above average. By the time they reach Year 11 students have reached very high standards. For example, 86% of students attained five A* to C GCSE passes including English and mathematics in 2014 which is well above average. The proportion of students achieving the 'English Baccalaureate', which includes C grades or better in GCSE sciences, history or geography and a modern foreign language, was 64% which is well above average.
- Rates of progress in both English and mathematics are far above the national averages. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those from below average, average and above average starting points make much better than expected progress. The attainment of minority ethnic students matches the high attainment of the White British students; both are in the top 10% of schools nationally.
- The attainment of disadvantaged students when they enter the school is much lower than other students; however, they make rapid progress. The proportion of disadvantaged students making expected progress in English and mathematics is much higher than for other students nationally. This means that by the time they finish Year 11, in English they attain on average two thirds of a grade higher than other students nationally and in mathematics they attain one grade higher than other students nationally. Compared to their peers in school at the end of Year 11, there is no difference in their average English grade and their mathematics grade is on average just half a grade lower.
- The most able students are supported and challenged well by their teachers. These students benefited from after-school 'A*/A clinics' which promote academic excellence and facilitate the transition from GCSE

into A-level study. The proportion of GCSE grades at A* or A in 2014 is 44% which is well above average.

- Approximately one quarter of students take GCSE mathematics in the summer of Year 10. These students are well prepared and clearly ready for the examination. They go on to take a demanding 'AO' mathematics course in Year 11 which further deepens their mathematical understanding in preparation for A-level courses.
- The achievement of disabled students or those who have special educational needs is at least good and at times is outstanding. These students are well provided for; they report great satisfaction with the school.
- The small number of students who study off site for part of their learning are making good progress.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- Students enter the sixth form with high prior attainment at GCSE. Approximately two thirds of Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form. Those who leave do so because they have not met the academic entry requirements or they are seeking courses or programmes other than the A-levels which are on offer in the sixth form.
- Good advice prior to joining Year 12 and excellent teaching ensure that there is a high degree of satisfaction among students with their study programmes. Once they have joined, a very high proportion of students stay all the way through to the completion of their A-levels; very few leave at the end of Year 12.
- Progress rates on A-level courses place the school in the top 15% of schools nationally. This leads to outstanding attainment; 63% of all A-level grades were at A* to B in 2014, well above the national average.
- Students say they are very well cared for and feel safe at all times. Through an effective programme of advice and guidance they are extremely well prepared for the next stage in their education which for the vast majority is a place in higher education, many achieving places at Russell Group universities. The recent 'personal statement day' is an example of the high quality of this advice programme.
- Attendance in the sixth form is very good; an overall figure of 97% places it well above average.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Excellent engagement is secured from the very beginning with, for example, a Year 12 induction event featuring a 'high-ropes' course designed to conquer fear and build teamwork.
- Teachers are well organised and take a structured approach to lessons that gives students a clear understanding of what they have to do to succeed and enables them to build on their prior learning. Scrutiny of sixth form students' work during the inspection confirmed that it is of a high quality and that students are confident and articulate when discussing the aims of their lessons and how they can improve their own learning.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. Senior leaders have high expectations of all students and set appropriately challenging targets for them which are well understood by students. They are adept at tracking their progress towards these targets and intervening when necessary.
- There is now a sharp focus on the quality of teaching in the sixth form; monitoring of teaching through lesson 'drop-ins' and work sampling enables a clear understanding of the work of departments to be formed.
- Senior leaders have shaped the sixth form skilfully as it has grown and become established in recent years. Sixth form students now make a strong contribution to the culture of the whole school; they are highly visible role models. Younger students aspire to join the sixth form and this spurs them on to achieve academically.

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	139151
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	449222

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	736
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	165
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Whittington
Headteacher	Andrew Moss
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01276 858084
Fax number	01276 855335
Email address	info@gordons.surrey.sch.uk

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