

Maidstone Grammar School

Barton Road, Maidstone, Kent ME15 7BT

Inspection dates

15–16 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

- Leaders are determined to provide the best possible education for pupils in the school. Leaders, including governors, are ambitious for academic excellence as well as seeing the need to develop character, resilience and independence.
- The headteacher and deputy headteachers lead the school with passion and determination. They have established a positive ethos which is helping to drive improvement, following a dip in outcomes in 2017.
- Capable and experienced governors carry out their duties conscientiously and rigorously. They visit regularly and have an accurate understanding of the school.
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge fosters an eagerness to learn across the school. Pupils show highly positive attitudes.
- Leaders have improved the quality of teaching, which is good overall. However, there are some inconsistencies in teaching. Teachers do not use assessment information consistently well to provide the right level of challenge and support to pupils.
- Some subject leaders have tackled the variability in teaching and pupils' progress more effectively than others.
- Better teaching over the last 18 months means that outcomes have improved. Attainment is well above national levels. The progress made by current pupils is good.
- Students in the sixth form have high aspirations, and their achievement is improving rapidly. Students are well prepared for their next steps.
- The taught curriculum is broad, rich and ambitious. Pupils also benefit from a wide range of cultural, sporting and community-based enrichment and extra-curricular activities. Careers education, advice and guidance are particular strengths.
- Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils thrive within the school's ethos to foster the growth of the whole individual alongside high expectations. The house system enhances the 'family feel' of the school. Support for pupils' mental health is well established.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils' conduct is excellent, and they show respect and care towards each other and adults. Attendance is above national levels.
- Safeguarding is a real strength of the school. Vulnerable pupils benefit from timely and effective support when required.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership further by raising the quality of subject leadership to that of the best.
- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers:
 - use assessment of pupils' progress to build on what pupils already know, understand and can do
 - challenge all pupils, particularly the most able pupils, to think deeply and explain what they have learned precisely.
- Improve pupils' progress across the curriculum and across all key stages.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has a clear and ambitious vision for the school and is ably supported by both deputy headteachers. Leaders are determined to help pupils achieve highly and to also develop confidence, resilience and independence through a rich, all-round education.
- GCSE and A-level outcomes fell in 2017. Leaders quickly introduced rigorous accountability systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and assess pupils' progress accurately. An unwavering determination by senior leaders, tighter subject leadership and effective training to improve teaching led to better A-level results in 2018. Overall, the progress made by current key stage 4 pupils is good and improving, particularly in English.
- Leaders know accurately the school's strengths and relative weaknesses. They plan carefully for future improvements, drawing on the excellent practice that exists in the school. Leaders demonstrate secure capacity to improve the school further. Pastoral and subject leaders new in post are developing well.
- Leaders' reorganisation of pupils into four houses with mixed-age tutor groups has been beneficial. Pupils appreciate the 'family feel' this engenders and show loyal competitiveness for their house.
- Some subject leaders show strong expertise and a determination to improve the quality of teaching and learning further. As a result of leaders' higher expectations, teaching overall is good, although some variation in the quality of teaching persists across and within subjects. In addition, some subject leadership is still in transition.
- Additional funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is spent effectively to improve the progress of pupils. Leaders make sure that these pupils are given appropriate support to address their learning needs
- Previously, leaders have not used additional funding effectively to support the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have recently sharpened actions to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. There are some early positive signs of the impact of these changes.
- The curriculum is ambitious, aiming for high academic achievement coupled with the development of personal skills and attributes. It offers a very wide range of academic subjects, and a much higher proportion of pupils enter the English Baccalaureate than the national average.
- Pupils and sixth-form students participate extensively in a wide range of extra-curricular subjects designed to develop character alongside enrichment and enjoyment. These include sporting and artistic activities, as well as community service and participation in the combined cadet force and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Staff and pupils show considerable commitment towards charitable work.
- The library is used extensively as a learning hub of the school. Pupils and students use it to read widely for pleasure as well as study. Pupils value the excellent facilities to complete homework, play chess and research choices for future education and

employment.

- High-quality careers education is a particular strength of the school. It contributes well to the development of pupils' aspirations and determination to succeed. The school has recently been successfully reassessed for the national Quality in Careers standard.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and is embedded throughout the curriculum. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain through the successful promotion of British values across the curriculum and the development of a strong sense of equality and personal responsibility.
- Of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, eight out of 10 would recommend the school to other parents.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has high aspirations and expectations of the school. Governors have a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and those areas which could be better. Governors offer leaders robust challenge and appropriate support to bring about the necessary improvements.
- Governors also draw on their considerable expertise and experience to enhance the school's effectiveness. This includes financial oversight.
- Governors visit the school regularly to test out what leaders tell them about improvements, priorities and challenges.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff have positive relationships with pupils and know them well. This means that staff are alert to any changes in pupils that may indicate a concern. Pupils feel safe in school. They are confident in knowing that there is always a trusted adult they can speak to if they are worried about something.
- Staff have received appropriate training for their roles and responsibilities and know what to do if they have a safeguarding concern. Training covers local and current concerns, and designated safeguarding leaders are fully versed in the potential risks to pupils' safety.
- The school has well-developed systems in place to secure the well-being and safety of pupils. Safeguarding records are up to date, and referrals are followed up promptly and are well documented. Safeguarding leaders work well with other agencies to help families receive the necessary support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers create a positive climate for learning. In class, pupils respond well to teachers' clear expectations. Learning routines are well established. Pupils expect to work hard, and they tackle tasks in class with a sense of purpose. Pupils work well together, supporting each other successfully with their learning.

- Pupils relish opportunities to discuss topics and respond positively to increased expectations. Overall, they are enjoying their learning more.
- Pupils benefit from teachers' strong subject knowledge across a wide range of subjects.
- The most successful teaching takes close account of pupils' individual starting points and uses a range of strategies to meet their needs. However, where teaching is less effective, teachers do not consistently use assessment of pupils' progress to set work at an appropriate level or devise engaging activities.
- Sometimes, the most able pupils are not given challenging enough tasks and do not make the progress of which they are capable. At other times, pupils are presented with tasks which they are not equipped to tackle because teachers have not checked their level of understanding carefully enough.
- Questioning by teachers is variable. Sometimes it probes pupils' knowledge and understanding carefully. On other occasions, teachers move on to the next task without fully challenging pupils' responses. This limits pupils' opportunities to think more deeply or apply their learning in unfamiliar contexts. This applies both to pupils' verbal and written responses.
- There are examples of effective feedback from teachers, in line with the school's expectations. In these instances, pupils clearly understand what they must do to improve, and they act on this feedback. However, there are some instances when the school's feedback policy is not being used effectively to help teachers plan the next steps in pupils' learning.
- Leaders have successfully raised the profile of homework across the school this year, following the school's policy.
- Leaders have put beneficial support in place to improve the minority of lessons where they judge teaching to be less effective. Alongside a revamped and comprehensive programme of professional development, bespoke support is leading to ongoing improvements in the quality of teaching.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. School leaders' and staff's commitment to inclusive values, mutual support and consideration for others is reflected in pupils' attitudes throughout the school. Teachers and pastoral leaders have created a caring environment alongside high expectations.
- Pupils are supported very well by pastoral staff. Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves are strong. Staff know pupils well and are alert to any difficulties pupils may be experiencing.
- Staff in the school show determination to help every pupil overcome the difficulties they face. They make sure that vulnerable pupils receive the right emotional and practical guidance and support. The school's pastoral support teams work effectively with a range of outside agencies to ensure that pupils receive the care and support they require.

- Leaders place a commendable emphasis on support for mental health and emotional well-being. There is a graded response to helping pupils overcome their concerns, including mentoring and counselling by professionals.
- Pupils feel safe and are confident to say what they think in a trusting atmosphere. Pupils know whom to turn to if they have any worries. They report that on the few occasions bullying takes place, they are confident that it will be dealt with appropriately.
- Careers education and guidance are of high quality. Leaders have devised a programme to raise pupils' awareness, from Year 8 onwards, of the range of opportunities available to them. Pupils benefit from a variety of careers initiatives, including wide-ranging careers fairs, supplemented by highly personalised support. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They are highly articulate and very keen to learn.
- The atmosphere around the school is purposeful and orderly, with pupils settling quickly into their routines. Pupils understand what adults expect of them and respond appropriately to any reminders they may need, so that high standards are maintained. Just occasionally, when teaching is not well matched to their needs, a few pupils lose interest.
- Pupils are polite and show respect and consideration for others. They are punctual to lessons, fully equipped, and are ready to get on with their learning as soon as they arrive.
- Pupils value their education, and attendance is above national levels and improving.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Standards are rising across the school in many subjects due to sharper leadership and better teaching. The school's performance information, along with work seen during the inspection, shows that progress is improving. Overall, outcomes are good, although there is some inconsistency between and within subjects.
- Provisional 2018 GCSE results indicate that pupils' attainment remains above national levels. The proportions of pupils achieving at least a grade 4 and grade 5 in both English and mathematics are well above the national average. Pupils' average points score in the English Baccalaureate is also above the national average. However, pupils' progress from their overall high starting points is in line with the national average and has been for the last three years.
- Overall, the subject coverage in pupils' written work is extensive and generally set at an ambitious level. However, scrutiny of work from pupils in Years 7 to 11 shows variation within subjects and between subjects. Some work is of a very high standard, but other work lacks depth.
- Work seen in lessons and in books shows that some of the most able pupils could be further stretched and challenged. Although pupils are presented with information

pitched at high academic levels, they are not routinely expected to demonstrate their understanding of the knowledge and how to apply it. During work scrutiny, inspectors found that pupils wrote convincing accounts to explain their thinking when they were required to do so. However, these high expectations are applied inconsistently, and sometimes pupils' work does not reach the highest standards.

- Pupils with SEND make good progress from their individual starting points. Pupils who are disadvantaged are now making better progress than previously.
- Outcomes in English have been too low but are now rapidly improving. Standards of reading are high across the school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Sixth-form provision has improved and is good. The leader of the sixth form has high aspirations and is improving the provision further.
- In 2017, students' progress on their A-level courses was below that of students with similar starting points nationally. Leaders responded rapidly and decisively. They identified where improvement was needed, implemented tighter systems and raised accountability. These actions led to a positive impact on outcomes. Provisional outcomes for 2018 show that the proportion of students who achieved the top A-level grades is well above the national figure and the progress made by students from their overall high starting points is now in line with the national average. Current students are making better progress than previously in many subjects, and standards overall are good and improving.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Inspection evidence, including talking to students and looking at their work, shows that teachers' secure subject knowledge, high expectations and skilful questioning are extending students' learning well. Teachers' strong subject expertise helps to interest students and promote high levels of engagement.
- However, there is variation between subjects and within subjects. Where learning is less effective, students are not routinely expected to explain their thinking accurately and succinctly. Expectations are not consistently high enough to enable students to achieve the highest A-level grades across the curriculum.
- The curriculum is well suited to students' starting points. It offers an extensive range of A-level courses, focused on subjects that facilitate further academic study.
- Retention of students from Year 12 into Year 13 is higher than national levels, with virtually all students progressing into Year 13. Recruitment from the school's Year 11 is high, and an increasing number of students join the sixth form from elsewhere. Pupils in Year 11 are fully informed about the range of post-16 opportunities available to them. Students who join Year 12 from other schools experience a smooth transition.
- The school meets the 16 to 19 programmes of study requirements. Non-qualification activities are wide and varied and include, for example, relevant work experience, extra-curricular activities and reading around their subjects. Most sixth-form students develop leadership skills, for example by organising fundraising events for charities, community service and mentoring younger pupils in their houses. Students appreciate

the diverse range of opportunities they can access.

- Personal development and careers programmes are a strength of the sixth form. These programmes have a positive effect on students' well-being and future employability. Students benefit from individual guidance to support their next steps.
- Almost all students who left the school in 2018 went on to further education, employment or training. The vast majority take up places at high-performing universities.

School details

Unique reference number	118835
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10084287

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	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1296
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	324
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Rolfe
Headteacher	Mark Tomkins
Telephone number	01622 752101
Website	www.mgs.kent.sch.uk
Email address	school@mgs.kent.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 September 2013

Information about this school

- Maidstone Grammar School is a larger-than-average-sized selective boys' school. It admits girls into the sixth form.
- The proportions of pupils from multi-ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are below the national average.
- A below-average proportion of pupils with SEND attend the school. The number of pupils who are disadvantaged is also below the national average.
- No pupils currently attend alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 41 lessons across a range of subjects and year groups. Some of these lessons were observed jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, other staff and governors.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons, around the school and during break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and around the school. They also met formally with groups of pupils.
- Inspectors considered the 131 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online parent survey.
- A wide range of documentation was reviewed, including information available on the school's website, and records relating to pupils' attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour. Information on governance, including minutes of governors' meetings, was examined. The school's self-evaluation summary and improvement plans were scrutinised, along with records of the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe.

Inspection team

Theresa Phillips, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Colin Lankester	Ofsted Inspector
Taj Bhambra	Ofsted Inspector
Julie Summerfield	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Carlyle	Ofsted Inspector

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