



Gillingham School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113882
LEA Dorset
Inspection number 279272
Inspection dates 6 March 2006 to 7 March 2006
Reporting inspector Anthony Shield AI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Hardings Lane
School category	Voluntary controlled		Gillingham
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Dorset SP8 4QP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01747 822222
Number on roll	1730	Fax number	01747 825263
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Ms Janet Robson
Date of previous inspection	20 September 1999	Headteacher	Mr Manlio Lenarduzzi

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large comprehensive school, situated in the small town of Gillingham in Dorset, with a large sixth form of 375 students. Pupils are largely White British, with few from other ethnic heritages. The social background of pupils is broadly average, whilst the proportion of those with learning difficulties is below average. The school is popular with parents and is oversubscribed.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Gillingham is an outstanding school, where standards are high and pupils make excellent progress. It offers excellent value for money. The school is characterised by a commitment to shared values, a strong sense of community and the confident belief of both staff and pupils that they can achieve. In the words of one parent, 'the school is a place where my child can thrive and flourish'. The school is ambitious for further improvement and, given its recent progress, is very well placed to achieve this. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Their maturity, behaviour and strong sense of responsibility to one another are reflected in their very positive attitudes to school and the enthusiasm with which they contribute to the school community. Pupils and staff get on very well with each other. The excellent curriculum is enriched by a range of very well supported extra-curricular activities. Consistently good teaching, coupled with a strong work ethic, ensures that pupils' achievements are high. Teaching is sometimes inspiring and pupils respond enthusiastically to opportunities to contribute and participate. However, a small number of lessons lack a sharp focus on what is to be learned. Opportunities are sometimes missed to encourage pupils to take responsibility for finding things out for themselves. School leadership provides a distinctive sense of vision and purpose. The school knows itself well and has comprehensive management systems to check on developments. A committed team of governors offers both challenge and support. The school modestly evaluates its own effectiveness as good. Inspectors judge its overall effectiveness as better than this.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Inspectors confirm the school's view that the school's sixth form is good. A-level results are well above average and reflect the good progress made by students. However, achievement is not consistently good in all subjects. Students are mature and enthusiastic about their learning. They enjoy being in the sixth form and particularly appreciate the excellent quality of care and guidance from their tutors and the opportunities offered by the outstanding curriculum. Teaching is good, and sometimes outstanding, but is not of a consistently good quality in all subjects. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- continue to improve overall progress, particularly in the sixth form, by ensuring teaching makes clear to pupils what they are expected to learn and provides more opportunities for them to work independently of the teacher.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils achieve exceptionally well, building progressively on their broadly average attainment on entry in Year 7. Standards throughout the school are high and both GCSE and A-level results have been significantly above the national average in recent years. The school received a School Achievement Award in both 2003 and 2004, in recognition of its high levels of achievement. Through Years 7-9 progress is excellent, though more consistently good in mathematics and science than English, where test results have varied, particularly amongst the higher attainers. However this is being tackled effectively and current standards of Year 9 pupils in English indicate that they are on track to do well this year. Outstanding progress is maintained through Years 10 and 11. The school achieved its best ever percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* - C grades at GCSE in 2005. Strong performances in both English and mathematics at this stage provide a strong foundation for success across a wide range of subjects. In 2005 there were particularly strong results in science, design and technology, geography and information and communication technology. However, almost all subjects do well, and there are relatively small variations in subject performance. Challenging targets for pupils' achievements have been consistently met or exceeded. Although girls reach higher standards, boys, who often start from a lower base, tend to make greater progress as they move through the school. Pupils with learning difficulties also make excellent progress. Standards reached in the sixth form are well above average and students' progress on both academic and vocational courses is good. However, achievement is not consistently good in all subjects. While students in psychology and geography make exceptional progress, in some other subjects individual student targets are not always met.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

A climate of mutual respect and sensitivity towards others reflects the outstanding personal development of pupils. As one parent commented: 'There is a genuine sense of pride at being a pupil or parent at Gillingham. It must be one of the few schools where it's cool to want to learn and achieve well'. Pupils enjoy coming to school and enthusiastically take part in lessons and out of school activities. Attendance is above average, and there is very little unauthorised absence. Pupils behave responsibly and courteously to each other. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils are careful with their own and each other's safety in lessons such as science and PE, and report that they feel safe at school. They have a good understanding of the importance of an active and healthy lifestyle and respond well to the range of sports on offer. The school's award of Sportsmark Gold is a reflection of its commitment to this area. They have a strong sense of belonging to a supportive and caring school community. Through year and school councils, pupils have pressed

the school to provide more healthy choices at lunchtime and they feel their opinions are listened to sympathetically. Pupils' opinions have informed many of the changes that have taken place, from a review of the curriculum to the availability of drinking water in lessons. Positive relationships flourish amongst pupils and they develop the social skills and personal qualities needed for their future adult working life. Sixth formers' mature and responsible behaviour is an excellent model for younger pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Outstanding teaching and learning ensure that pupils make exceptional progress. Classrooms are positive and vibrant places; pupils enjoy learning and teachers enjoy teaching. Teachers have a very good subject knowledge which lends confidence to their teaching. Most lessons are planned carefully. As a result, pupils of all abilities are challenged through a range of suitably adapted tasks that interest and motivate them. Work is regularly marked, with helpful guidance on how to improve. Consequently, pupils know what they are aiming for and how they need to improve. Pupils speak very positively about their learning and they value and respect their teachers. They fully understand that a lot is expected of them and most respond well to the challenges set. Much teaching is inspirational and provides exciting opportunities for pupils to participate actively, contribute ideas through discussion, and think for themselves. This was observed in both an outstanding mathematics lesson in Year 8 and a psychology lesson in Year 12. However, some learning lacks focus because pupils are not always clear about the purpose of tasks set. Teaching in the sixth form is usually of a good quality and students respond with a growing maturity and make good progress. However, some learning in both the main school and in the sixth form is too passive. In some lessons, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to discuss ideas and to actively get involved, using their skills, for example to research information and draw conclusions independently of the teacher.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Pupils' enjoyment and excellent achievement is due to in part the outstanding curriculum. All pupils have a broad range of programmes that match their needs and potential very well. This includes flexible vocational routes in Years 10 and 11 for those who are less academically able. The curriculum has developed sensibly in response to a careful consideration of local needs. The school has achieved excellence in many areas, including sport, art, science and mathematics. Pupils receive excellent preparation for future employment through well-organised work-related studies and work experience. There is also an extensive choice of subjects on offer in the sixth form, contributing to high stay-on and retention rates. The school offers a superb range of

enrichment activities, visitors and visits, which many pupils enthusiastically embrace. Music and sport are particularly popular. There are also well-planned health education and citizenship programmes.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

All pupils, including the most vulnerable, are supported by the school's outstanding procedures for care and guidance. Pupils are confident that adults care about them and will help them in fulfilling their potential. The pastoral structure and procedures are excellent. However, it is the high quality of individual support provided by the skilled pastoral teams which make the school's work in this area so distinctive. Heads of year and tutors know pupils well, and work with commitment to ensure pupils' personal and academic development is carefully tracked. The school develops a particularly strong three-way relationship between school, home and child. Very good guidance is provided when pupils make choices about their future subject options, or higher education and careers choices. Good behaviour is encouraged. Where difficulties do arise, the school provides a safe and supportive environment where problems can be solved. Child protection and health and safety procedures are securely in place, and there are good links with other agencies to ensure pupils' well-being. Academic guidance for sixth form students is outstanding. Pupils thrive in this caring and supportive environment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's outstanding leadership and management are characterised by shared values and a rigorous focus on achievement. The headteacher and senior staff provide exemplary leadership, which is high profile, principled and determined. They consistently promote the importance of 'treating others as we would expect them to treat us', and are totally committed to the continuing development of a positive and trusting environment. High expectations and humane values permeate the school, which is a harmonious and inclusive community. These values are strongly supported throughout the school, where shared leadership is a distinctive feature. Senior staff and governors have a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and priorities for development and they are energetic in seeking improvements. Governors are outstanding as "critical friends" and they play a direct role in many aspects of self-evaluation. School funds are prudently managed and wisely spent. Heads of department and heads of year also actively and enthusiastically engage with honest, good quality, self-critical review. There is no complacency. All teachers observe lessons, and all teachers are observed. The focus is on mutual learning. A range of data is analysed, in order to identify areas for improvement and set challenging targets for pupils. Performance management is well established and there is an excellent, well co-ordinated programme of professional development. The formal and informal systems of staff support are excellent. There

have been some innovative developments, including the creation of a head of year with no specific responsibilities and who is able to support colleagues. This is much valued by staff. Parents are extremely supportive of the school and their views are regularly sought. The school is always responsive to comments raised by parents.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

8 March 2006 Dear Pupils, Thank you very much for being so welcoming when we recently visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and were particularly impressed by the courteous way in which you greeted us and the sensible way in which you answered our questions. It is clear that almost all of you enjoy being at the school and think it is a good place to be. Here are some of the main findings from our report:

- The school's distinctive atmosphere provides a learning environment in which you are able to thrive and flourish
- Teachers take considerable care to ensure that you are well looked after and supported through school
- You are taught exceptionally well and, as a result, most of you are making outstanding progress
- The sixth form offers you good opportunities to excel
- Many of you develop confident personal and social skills, which help prepare you well for your future beyond school
- The curriculum is excellent and there is a superb range of clubs and enrichment activities
- The headteacher, his senior team and all other managers carry out their responsibilities exceptionally well.

Although we judge teaching to be outstandingly good overall, not all lessons are of this high quality. When the teaching is not so good, it is often because you are not clear about what you are expected to learn during the lesson. In addition, sometimes you do not get enough opportunities to work independently of the teacher. Thanks you once again for your help during our visit. Good luck with your work in the future! Yours sincerely Tony Shield Lead Inspector