



Maidstone Grammar School for Girls

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118836
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280406
Inspection dates 31 January 2006 to 1 February 2006
Reporting inspector Sheila Browning AI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)	School address	Buckland Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Maidstone
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Kent ME16 0SF
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01622 752103
Number on roll	1137	Fax number	01622 681947
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Molly Tipples
Date of previous inspection	6 March 2000	Headteacher	Mr John Harrison

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school draws its students from among the top 30% of girls in the local 11 plus examinations. This means that, although students' attainment on entry is well above average, it is not as high as in most other selective schools. The school is larger than most and has an average sized sixth form. Boys join the school in the sixth form from a wide range of educational backgrounds. Most students are from White British families although several minority ethnic groups are represented in small numbers. There are very few students for whom English is an additional language. Students come from generally advantaged social and economic backgrounds and relatively few have learning needs or disabilities. The school has had specialist status for science since September 2005 and holds Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. The school judges its effectiveness as satisfactory. This is unduly modest and does not reflect the success of the changes that have already been introduced. It is improving rapidly following a period of upheaval and high staff turnover. The recently appointed acting headteacher, supported by a strong leadership team of senior managers, has ensured that the school has a very good understanding of its strengths and what it needs to do to improve. Standards throughout the school are exceptionally high and, overall, learners make good progress. Nonetheless, some of the most able students do not achieve their full potential by attaining the highest grades at GCSE. The leadership team have identified this and has rigorously implemented initiatives that are already improving the quality of teaching and raising standards. Parents overwhelmingly express their confidence in recent changes.

The school has been very successful in creating an ethos where students are keen to learn. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students develop excellent interpersonal skills and large numbers participate in the impressive range of extracurricular activities. They respond eagerly to the good opportunities in the curriculum and many take up positions of responsibility. Many are involved in community work in the locality and students regularly raise funds for a wide variety of charities. The school provides good value for money. Its recent designation as a specialist science college is allowing the school to further broaden the curriculum. For example, students taking three separate sciences can now take an additional GCSE in astronomy. Overall the school has maintained most of the strengths identified in the last inspection and has successfully tackled the mostly minor issues from that inspection. Its capacity to make further improvements is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are good. The sixth form is well led and managed and, although the school judged sixth form effectiveness as only satisfactory, the constant focus on raising student achievement is bringing about noticeable improvement in the quality of work produced. Students attain high standards and achieve well. Retention rates are high. The excellent consortium arrangements with five local schools and a further education college give students a very wide range of courses to choose from. Many students take part in the wide range of extracurricular activities, especially the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. The curriculum is outstanding. Teaching is good and students, who are attentive and diligent, learn well. Students receive outstanding pastoral care and guidance about their futures and they mature into thoughtful young men and women. Most proceed to university.

What the school should do to improve further

- Help the most able students to achieve their full potential and ensure that activities planned for them in lessons are always sufficiently challenging

- Improve the quality of marking and assessment, so that pupils always receive clear guidance on how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' standards are exceptionally high. Students make good progress. In the Year 9 national tests in 2005 all groups of students did well in relation to their ability and those who started at the school with below average standards made especially strong progress. Test results for 2005, particularly those for English and mathematics, showed a very strong improvement on those in 2004.

Learners exceeded the school's challenging targets in GCSE examinations in 2005. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE grades at C or above and those achieving the very highest grades increased in 2005. Nearly all students gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A*–C, including in English and mathematics. Results in English and mathematics improved significantly in 2005. Nonetheless analysis of data over recent years shows some underachievement at GCSE A* and A grades. The school is alert to this and now intervenes to give very good support to raise achievement of the higher attainers. The approach to mentoring Year 11 students is contributing significantly to the clear signs of improvement.

In the sixth form over 50% of A level passes have been at grades A and B for several years. Given the broader range of students attending the sixth form these results represent good achievement. A level results have fluctuated in recent years but results in 2005 show a slight upward trend on those of 2004. In 2005 the proportion of those who achieved two or more A levels or AS equivalent was very high. Nevertheless there are some variations in the performance of different subjects and effective steps are being taken to rectify this. As a result students currently in the sixth form are achieving well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Nearly all students enjoy their education and speak enthusiastically of the friendly spirit within the school. This is reflected in very good attendance and punctuality and the high proportion of students who continue into the sixth form. With a few minor exceptions behaviour is excellent. Students are very considerate and respectful of others. They say they feel safe, that incidents of bullying are rare, and that they are listened to and valued. They take good advantage of the many opportunities given to assume roles of responsibility. Students can make their voices heard through the school council and have the satisfaction of knowing that suggestions for changes are adopted.

A very effective programme of personal, social and health education lessons and school assemblies contribute significantly to the students' excellent personal and spiritual development and help them to adopt healthy lifestyles. Students' awareness of moral issues and opportunities for social and cultural development are excellent. There is a

high level of commitment by students to extracurricular activities and Duke of Edinburgh Award activities. Students also make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community through their involvement in charity fundraising and through community sports leadership schemes. Most students are self confident, articulate ambassadors for the school. Excellent careers guidance, work experience, and opportunities for all students to take part in mini-enterprise schemes ensure that they have very well developed workplace skills. Students are also very well prepared to make decisions for their future education and employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The school rates teaching and learning as satisfactory because it has identified a few areas where teaching is not as effective as it would wish. Nevertheless, the many steps in place to tackle weaknesses and to spread good practice are already having a positive impact. A group of teachers meet regularly to discuss teaching ideas and now some students are contributing their thoughts about good teaching.

Teachers know their subjects very well which contributes to the success of many lessons, particularly in the sixth form. Many teachers are skilful at steering students to work together and some excellent discussions, for example in sociology and geography, were observed. In all years students respond well to intellectually demanding questions and are attentive and hard working. In a personal and social education lesson Year 7 students confidently stated their personal views about vegetarianism and Year 9 students responded very well when encouraged to think independently and critically when writing poetry in English. Students learn well when they assess each other's work because it helps them to recognise what is required to improve their work.

The school is fully aware of the elements of teaching which require development. Not all teachers consider students' different levels of abilities and prepare work that matches their needs so that, occasionally, work is not demanding enough for the most able girls. Teachers do not always mark work regularly or give students enough guidance on what they need to do to improve although examples of excellent practice certainly exist. A few teachers have a tendency to over direct lessons and not to consider the use of visual stimuli, praise, variety and fun.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is good in Years 7 to 11 and outstanding in the sixth form. Currently there are some limitations in vocational opportunities in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9 students learn two foreign languages and they take drama in Years 7 and 8. Provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology is

good. GCSE students can choose from a comprehensive range of subjects. Most sixth form students take A levels although, as the school is now part of a successful local consortium, they take a wider choice of academic and vocational courses. Students from the different schools study well together. The bigger classes provide greater opportunities for stimulating discussion, debate and extra challenge and dimension to their learning. Subjects such as business and economics, sociology and psychology are popular.

Amnesty Week, an arts day and a Rag Week for fundraising are valuable additions to the regular curriculum. Large numbers of students take the Duke of Edinburgh Award. In addition to an impressive range of extracurricular activities especially in drama and sports, work experience in Year 11, work shadowing in Year 12, mini-enterprise days and Young Enterprise ventures all contribute to the students' rich and interesting experience. Students are well prepared for their future, and develop strong leadership and team working skills, initiative and self confidence. The school is open to new ideas and, with the opportunities afforded through its science status, it is keen to review its curriculum regularly in order to match students' interests and aspirations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that the quality of care, support and guidance for its students is good. The school has a very good induction programme for all staff new to the school and they become well acquainted with procedures for health and safety and student welfare. Effective child protection procedures are in place and these are understood and followed. There are good arrangements for safeguarding students in lessons and around the school. Staff are conscientious in ensuring that students are as safe as possible on school trips. Systems for tracking students' academic progress and intervening when students show signs of underachievement are more effective in some subjects than in others at present. The school recognises this and has recently put in place a more rigorous system for monitoring students' achievement to ensure that all subjects check regularly on how students are making progress against their targets. The quality of advice and guidance given about courses at Key Stage 4 and in further and higher education is excellent. The small number of students with learning difficulties or disabilities are supported well enabling them to achieve as well as their peers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The acting headteacher and senior leadership team are mostly very new to their roles. Supported by a very experienced headteacher from a neighbouring school, they have carefully analysed examination results and monitored teaching and students' work. They have undertaken comprehensive surveys of the views of parents and students. Through this good monitoring and self-evaluation the leadership team have identified

that, although students attain high standards, some are capable of doing even better. This commendable lack of complacency has been a spur to significant recent school improvement with a number of initiatives introduced to further raise standards, including the setting of challenging targets and a tighter focus on matching teaching to students' different abilities. Teachers' morale has been raised and staff turnover has been reduced as a result. Leadership and management are good. This is a view shared by parents. Parents voice worries over what they perceive to have been a decline in the school in recent years but many write to express their confidence in the acting headteacher and to praise the tangible improvements already achieved this year. Additionally, significant improvement is seen in the test and examination results from 2004 to 2005.

Several governors have only recently joined the governing body but they have developed a good appreciation both of the strengths of the school and of those areas that could be improved. They are supportive but have not been afraid to question and challenge staff. Their energy and enthusiasm are also helping to drive school improvement.

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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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

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

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We are grateful to you for giving us your views because it helped us to make our judgements. Many of you told us how much you enjoyed learning, of the good relationships between you and the staff, and that you felt safe and enjoyed taking part in the wide range of extracurricular activities offered.

As a result of the inspection we have found that yours is a good school.

The main strengths in your school are:

You are helped to make good progress so that many of you do well in your tests, GCSEs and A Levels

Your attitudes are good and your behaviour and personal skills are excellent.

You are well cared for, guided and supported by the school

You actively take on responsibilities and make an outstanding contribution to the community

The curriculum and other activities offer you many good opportunities to pursue your interests.

To make your school even better we have asked the staff to improve two main things:

Ensure that the most able students do their very best, and make sure that work is always well matched to suit their needs.

Ensure that marking and assessment always gives students useful feedback to help them improve.