



The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118872
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280418
Inspection dates 28 September 2005 to 29 September 2005
Reporting inspector Meena Wood HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)	School address	Wilmington Grange Parsons Lane Wilmington Dartford, Kent DA2 7BB
School category	Foundation		
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01322 226351
Number on roll	736	Fax number	01322 222607
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Adrian Jones
Date of previous inspection	1 November 1999	Headteacher	Mrs Maggie Bolton

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 28 September 2005 - 29 September 2005	Inspection number 280418
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

Description of the school

The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington is a selective school. The school sixth form has 163 pupils and the curriculum has common timetabling arrangements for some subjects with Wilmington Grammar School for boys. It is located on the outskirts of Dartford on the borders of three local education authorities (LEAs) and draws over two thirds of its pupils from Kent and the rest from Bexley, Bromley and some of the south eastern boroughs. Most pupils are White British with about one tenth from minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below the national average, as is the percentage entitled to free school meals.

The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington provides an effective education and a caring, orderly and supportive environment for its pupils. Attendance is outstanding and behaviour is very good. Pupils enjoy being at school and positively contribute to the school and local communities. A healthy lifestyle is encouraged through sport and healthy eating options in the canteen. The care and support offered to pupils are good, and many subjects give pupils clear guidance on how they need to improve. However, this is not consistent across all subjects.

Teaching is satisfactory and teachers have good subject knowledge. Pupils are very well motivated and the majority begin school in Year 7 with high attainment. They ensure they make the most of their lessons and they learn well. However, teachers do not consistently plan lessons to meet the range of pupils' needs. The more able pupils are not always as well challenged as they could be, and sometimes lower attaining pupils could do with more support. In some subjects, teaching does not stimulate pupils' independent thinking. Overall, however, standards are high, and pupils make good progress. Results in mathematics, ICT, history and modern foreign languages are exceptional. However, progress in English in Years 10 and 11 is not as good as in other subjects.

Inspectors broadly agreed with the overall judgements of the school. However, self-evaluation does not place sufficient emphasis on improving teaching. Not all subject departments plan well enough for improvement. The headteacher and the senior managers recognise the challenges faced by the school to further improve pupils' progress and standards, and are supported actively by the governing body. The school provides good value for money. Since the previous inspection, the school has demonstrated the capacity to improve and addressed the improvement of ICT provision well. It has successfully gained Specialist School Status for mathematics and computing.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Pass rates and retention on AS and A level courses are high. Students are highly committed, learn well and make good progress. Teaching is satisfactory as, although teachers are knowledgeable subject specialists, they are not all helping students sufficiently to develop their independent learning and critical thinking skills. Guidance and support for students are good. Students value the high levels of personal support they receive from teachers and tutors. As part of a local schools' consortium, the leadership of the sixth form has been proactive in broadening the sixth form curriculum in response to the vocational abilities and interests of the students. It is too early to assess the impact of the change on the quality of education that students experience.

What the school should do to improve further

- raise achievement and standards in GCSE English
- improve teaching, ensuring higher attaining pupils are fully challenged and lower attaining pupils better supported where

necessary • ensure all pupils are aware of what they need to do to improve their work in all subjects • ensure greater consistency in the quality of departmental management, review and improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Inspectors agreed with the school's evaluation that achievement and standards are good. The standards reached in the Year 9 national tests are well above the national average and have remained consistently high. A high proportion of pupils attain very high scores in their tests. By the end of Year 9 all pupils make the progress that is expected of them and many do better. They attain high standards in mathematics, English and science, meeting challenging targets. Pupils generally make progress in line with, or better than, expectations from Year 7 to Year 11. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is high and they leave year 11 with well above average results in GCSE examinations. In particular, results for GCSE mathematics, ICT and modern foreign languages were very high in 2004. However, although a very high proportion of pupils attain five or more GCSEs A*–C (including mathematics and English), in relation to their prior attainment, comparatively few pupils attain the highest grades. GCSE English results are not as good as mathematics or science because fewer of the pupils make good progress and, in particular, more able pupils do not always achieve their full potential. Those pupils who go on to the sixth form do well in their examinations, and results are well above average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school evaluates pupils' personal development and well-being as outstanding, but inspectors judge it as good. There are many strengths. Pupils have many opportunities to undertake leadership responsibilities as prefects, buddies, mentors, and through the active school council. They develop a good sense of social awareness within the school's strong moral framework and through serving the local community. Pupils brought thoughtful and attractive food baskets to the Harvest Festival assembly and Year 8 pupils, during form time, spoke sensitively of why their chosen charity should receive funding. However, pupils' awareness of diverse cultures is not so well broadened by the school. Opportunities to extend citizenship skills are not fully developed for all pupils across the school.

Strong links are forged with local businesses, enabling pupils to experience a real understanding of the world. Year 10 pupils successfully engage in mini enterprises, designing, marketing and selling their chosen products, and have recently won three top awards. Sixth form students are involved in voluntary activities such as voluntary service unit (VSU) linked to the Millennium Award.

The school has created a harmonious environment for its pupils. One Year 11 pupil stated "this is a happy school". Pupils speak about the school positively as a place where they are well motivated, feel safe and do well in their studies. Pupils are punctual,

attendance is excellent and they are very well behaved and courteous. A few pupils in Years 10 and 11 who have been less well behaved have been effectively supported and encouraged to change. Pupils adopt safe practices and the school promotes healthy lifestyles. Pupils enjoy sport and taking part in extra curricular activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school judges that the quality of teaching is good. Inspectors found that, whilst there are good features, the overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. Nevertheless, such are pupils' very good attitudes to learning, that they work exceptionally hard and make sure that overall they progress well. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are highly committed to developing good relationships with pupils. They use an energetic blend of humour and firmness to manage classes effectively and pupils enjoy their lessons. Interactive whiteboards are used successfully in mathematics to focus all pupils' attention on the task and to help them understand and learn. Teaching activities and materials in a number of lessons do not help pupils of different abilities to learn at their own pace. In some lessons, more able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged and a minority of pupils do not always fully understand new concepts or tasks. Particularly in GCSE and sixth form lessons, teachers do not create sufficient opportunities for pupils and students to help themselves and to help each other take the next steps in their learning. They then become more passive listeners, asking few questions, and so do not make the progress they could. In some subjects, pupils do have good opportunities to work independently and creatively. In ICT lessons, pupils develop their own short films using video material which they have recorded during music and art lessons. Pupils enjoy these challenges and respond very well, showing what heights they can achieve.

Teachers praise pupils well in class. Most, but not all, teachers mark pupils' work effectively and guide them on how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has improved since the last inspection and now offers pupils a good range of choices as they progress through the school. All pupils have regular access to ICT teaching. Pupils extend their skills further through short ICT qualifications in Years 10 and 11. In Year 10, pupils are given additional opportunities to extend their skills in mathematics. Electronic learning outside school hours, in some subject areas, enables pupils to access support materials from home. Beyond lessons, pupils enjoy a wide range of sporting and cultural opportunities, and learn from educational visits and residential stays. A good variety of clubs and activities is provided during the lunch period. Through successful collaborative arrangements with neighbouring schools, sixth form students now have an increased choice of subjects at GCE A level. They also

have some limited options, at present, of undertaking AVCE at a local school and enrichment courses at the local college. Pupils develop their understanding of the world of work through well organised work experience in Year 11. Pupils have good opportunities to learn about how companies work and to appreciate the importance of understanding financial systems.

The school's status as a mathematics and computing specialist school has positively improved pupils' learning opportunities and has increased the range of courses. Pupils develop skills in mathematics and ICT and apply these successfully to other areas of their learning. Attainment targets for pupils at the end of the first year have been met. The wider community, including parents and pupils from partner primary and secondary schools, has benefited from attending ICT courses at the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are cared for well. Staff use child protection systems effectively. Pupils' progress is monitored and they are set targets in their planners. However, not all teachers as yet use the information regularly to help pupils improve their work.

Pupils who feel distressed or anxious are supported successfully by adults and mentors. As one Year 10 pupil stated "there are lots of people we can get support and advice from". However, in a very small minority of cases, a few parents believe that school procedures have not dealt effectively with incidents of bullying. A learning mentor/assistant (Additional Educational Needs) for supporting pupils with learning difficulties in the classroom has been recently appointed.

Year 9 pupils gain good advice from tutors about subject choices at GCSE. Careers advice ensures that pupils are carefully guided on career choices, training and further education. Some pupils reported that they would like to know more about other sixth form provision within the area.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior managers are constructively critical and know what they need to do to make standards even better. Communication between teachers and managers of the school's priorities and targets for improvement is good. A highly supportive mentoring system is in place for trainee teachers. Communication between school and parents is secure, but is sometimes less effective where parents believe they do not receive sufficient information from the school. Parents' views are welcomed, and the parent evening questionnaires are effectively used to inform the self-evaluation process.

The monitoring of lessons provides accurate assessments of the quality of teaching. The school recognises the need to provide more staff training to help teachers stretch pupils more effectively in lessons. Most managers and teachers make very good use of data to monitor school and departmental performance. The school is very clear on

what needs to improve. However, neither the school development plan nor most subject development plans identify specific actions to make improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. This makes it harder to follow through and ensure that improvements take place. Examples of good practice do exist in modern foreign languages, where the departmental plan clearly reports on what is being done to improve teaching and learning.

Governors are actively involved and supportive of the school. Although the school has written a policy on race equality, there has been no reporting to parents on the impact of the policy. The standard of accommodation is inadequate but pupils are strongly encouraged to help keep classrooms and corridors attractive and clean. There are plans to make significant improvements to the school's buildings over the next few years.

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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	2
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	2	2
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	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
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

The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington Wilmington Grange Parsons Lane Wilmington Dartford
Kent DA2 7BB

30th September 2005

Dear Pupils and Students

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school. •We believe your school is a good school. The school environment is safe, caring and supportive and helps you to learn. •The headteacher and the other people in the school with responsibility lead and manage the school well. Through the school council and positions of responsibility which many of you have, you play your part in improving the school. •Your daily attendance at the school is outstanding and your behaviour in lessons and out of lessons is very impressive. •You enjoy coming to school and you do well in most subjects, but particularly, in mathematics, ICT, French and German. You contribute very well to the life of the school and many of you contribute in positive ways to your local communities. •A large number of you take part in extra activities, particularly sport, and enjoy the options of a healthy diet at lunchtimes.

Your school needs to:

- work with you more effectively to improve your progress and results in GCSE English
- make the teaching even better by making sure the most able of you are always challenged and those who find something difficult are always supported
- tell you more clearly what you need to do to improve
- make sure the teachers who lead the different subjects all plan and carry out the improvements needed methodically.

Thank you for taking part in the inspection, by talking to us about your work and your life in school. I wish you success for the future.

Meena Wood HMI Lead Inspector