



Saint George's Church of England School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118876
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 280420
Inspection dates 16–17 October 2006
Reporting inspector Robert Ellis HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Meadow Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Gravesend
Age range of pupils	11–18		DA11 7LS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01474 533082
Number on roll (school)	1040	Fax number	01474 533844
Number on roll (6th form)	217		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Joe King
		Headteacher	Ann Moore
Date of previous school inspection	4 December 2000		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	16–17 October 2006	280420

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by a team comprising two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St. George's is a large wide ability school. It has humanities college status, specialising in history, English and religious education. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school at age 11 is slightly below average overall as many local pupils attend grammar schools. About one in five pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities, a proportion which is above the national average. Around one in seven pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and a few are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly average. In 2005 the school obtained the quality mark for Quality in Study Support and was awarded the International School Award by the British Council.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Saint George's School provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils and is improving.

Strengths include the pupils' good personal development and well-being that are nurtured by the good pastoral care given by the staff of the school. The pupils' enjoyment of learning is good. They feel safe in school and make a good contribution to the community. Behaviour is satisfactory and most pupils are willing to learn, which provides a good foundation for further improvements.

Teaching is satisfactory overall and ensures that most pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make satisfactory progress. However, there is too much variability in the quality of teaching.

Standards have improved since the last inspection and although they are below average by the end of Year 11, they represent satisfactory achievement, given pupils' skills on entry. Within that overall picture, however, improvement has been uneven and some pupils underachieve. This is because the quality of assessment of pupils' academic progress and the setting of realistic challenging targets has not been consistent enough, and learning objectives have not enabled pupils to meet their challenging targets.

Most parents say that their children enjoy school and are making good progress. However, a small but significant minority think that the school does not take sufficient account of their suggestions and concerns and that communication between home and school could be better.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior leaders have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development, although they judge leadership to be good rather than satisfactory because they have over-valued the outcomes of actions taken. Subject leaders are increasingly involved in strengthening provision. However, the impact of their actions has been too variable. Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning ensures that senior leaders are well informed and appropriate action is being taken to improve teaching. Governors are well informed and are supportive. The issues for improvement identified by the last inspection have been successfully addressed and there is a clear capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory. The students' achievements and standards are satisfactory and learning is underpinned by good personal development. A range of AS and A level courses is offered within the school and for a minority of students choice is extended by participation in a local sixth form consortium arrangement. The school recognises that the sixth form curriculum does not meet the needs of all sixth formers and provides too few opportunities for students to pursue vocational courses and as a result has planned to extend provision. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, however small group sizes in some subjects limit the range of learning opportunities.

A new mentoring system is being developed to provide support and academic guidance. Students are very positive about the guidance they receive from staff and would recommend the sixth form to others. They have opportunities to assume responsibilities within the main school and the Pupil Support Group was awarded the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Award for its work with younger pupils. However there are limited opportunities as yet for students' enrichment through extra-curricular activities. The new sixth form progress manager is beginning to implement changes leading to improvement although it is too early to judge their impact.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise expectations of what the pupils can achieve by ensuring that progress in lessons is achieved and by setting consistently challenging targets.
- Develop the sixth form curriculum so that it meets the needs and interests of the students.
- Sharpen the focus on raising attainment and improve the quality of teaching to ensure that teaching consistently meets the needs of all pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils join the school with standards that are slightly below average and as many local children attend grammar schools the school has a lower proportion of higher attaining pupils than many schools. During their time in school they make satisfactory progress but pupils at the higher end of the ability spectrum, especially girls in Years 10 and 11, make less progress than they should.

Standards at the end of Year 9 have improved and are broadly in line with the national average. In all core subjects, partly due to the attainment on entry, a smaller than average proportion of pupils attains the higher levels and this is particularly significant in English. The school is aware of this and is implementing targeted support and interventions to support improvement.

GCSE results had risen year-on-year until 2005 but are still below average. Although the 2006 results do not show that the rise in attainment has continued, pupils still made good progress between Years 9 and 11. This was partly due to the use of learning mentors and other strategies linked to the school's specialist status. There are significant differences in the GCSE results across subjects which are linked to the quality of teaching and learning that the pupils received in those subjects. The 2006 results show an improvement in several subjects although standards in geography and French are still not good enough.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy being at school and think it is a "very positive community". Attendance has improved and is now good. Pupils' attitudes in lessons vary, from being very constructive to some low level disruption: the attitudes generally reflect the quality of the teaching. Some pupils are slow to get to lessons but behaviour is improving and satisfactory overall. Parents and pupils identify that behaviour has improved recently, whilst recognising that there are still elements of unsatisfactory behaviour. Pupils are friendly and generally helpful to one another and to adults. They are aware of and respond well to the changes the school has made to promote healthy lifestyles. Pupils develop well through the outstanding opportunities provided to contribute to the community. These opportunities reflect the positive impact of the school's specialist humanities status on "valuing all pupils and valuing their diversity". Skills for the workplace are developed satisfactorily. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall and pupils make good progress. A particular strength is the international dimension to the school's activities, which supports well all four elements of this aspect of pupils' development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In some lessons good subject knowledge leads to probing questioning and assessment criteria are well used to support students towards independence, enabling them to evaluate their own and each other's work. In these lessons the pupils make good progress because a variety of well planned activities hold their interest and ICT is used effectively to increase enjoyment. However, in most lessons progress is only satisfactory, because activities are not closely matched to the pupils' needs and abilities and pupils are not given enough opportunities to develop independence. In too many lessons time is not well used and too much talking by teachers means that not everyone is involved, which can lead to distraction and low level disruptive behaviour. This is not always effectively checked, so students are not clear about the work, which affects their progress.

Marking is inconsistent. Many books contain helpful comments about how to improve work, though this varies across and within subjects. Many displays in classrooms include descriptions of what is needed for particular examination grades, but this is not used consistently to enable students to evaluate their work and to improve. Progress is tracked regularly and support is provided for those who fall behind.

Staff and pupils regularly observe lessons. Feedback from pupils complements the views of staff and focuses on enjoyment. Observations support planning for training and the school is developing imaginative approaches to creating development time to further improve teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

Recent changes to the curriculum have sought to maximise pupils' choice and enjoyment. GCSE courses start in Year 9 except in mathematics, English and science, and this has already helped to improved behaviour. Pupils welcome the opportunities for early choice and they are also enthusiastic about the range of languages offered from Year 8. Partnerships with a local college enable significant numbers follow vocational pathways and this has also increased enjoyment. The impact of these curriculum changes on results is yet to be seen, as the first groups of pupils take examinations in 2007.

There is a broad range of extra-curricular provision with good participation rates. These have been further increased by a more fluid end to the formal day with some extra-curricular programmes starting midway through the last period of the day. This flexible timetabling has also enabled the introduction of study sessions and other support activities which are matched to learners' needs and arise from reviews and tracking of pupils' progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Christian values are a significant feature of the work of the school and this is very well illustrated through the clear focus on care and guidance of pupils. Procedures for ensuring pupils' safety and welfare, including child protection, are good. Care, guidance and support are very well led throughout the school. There are very good links with external agencies. This, together with a close working relationship with form tutors and parents, provides a strong pastoral support network which ensures that most pupils, including the vulnerable, receive good advice and guidance. Pupils feel safe and are well supported by a team of tutors who know them well. Many students in Year 11 and the sixth form are pupil mentors and provide very good support for the more vulnerable pupils. A Year 9 pupil remarked "it's good that the school accepts us as we are and does all it can to make sure we all do the best that we possibly can." Tutors monitor progress effectively and provide good academic guidance based on a range of information from the time pupils start the school in Year 7. Effective use of assessment information helps teachers to identify underachieving pupils and intervene appropriately. Although pupils receive some advice when deciding on which subjects to choose for public examination courses, careers advice generally is inadequate. Sixth form students are also not receiving appropriate guidance. A very good system of

induction and links with primary schools, including visits by potential pupils, ensures that there is a good start for all pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher and her senior team have a strong working partnership, are committed to improvement and are not complacent about the school's overall effectiveness.

The school has moved away from a traditional management structure in order to give some management responsibility to all teachers. Progress managers have recently been introduced who are responsible for pastoral care but also have an academic focus. Some staff have embraced change enthusiastically but others have been more reluctant to implement new innovations and this has resulted in inconsistent implementation of systems and procedures designed to bring about improvement. Some staff attribute their reluctance to being overburdened by the volume of new initiatives that are undertaken and say that insufficient time is given for new practices to be embedded. As a result these variations the focus on raising attainment is not consistently sharp across the school.

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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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
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	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
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	3	

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?	3	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much for letting us observe your lessons and a special thank you to those of you who spoke to us about your school and your work.

Everyone we spoke to said that you enjoy being at school and feel safe and well looked after and we agree. We were pleased to see that many of you like eating healthy food and understand the benefits of exercise. We were impressed by your friendliness and how well you look after your school and each other.

Most of you are keen to learn but some of you don't get involved enough in your lessons and expect the teachers and adults to do too much for you.

The people who have responsibility for making decisions about your school have your best interests at heart and, through the school council and your attitude to school, you can play your part in continuing to improve your school.

Although some things have improved since the last inspection, for example your attendance, there are still many things that need to be better.

Your school needs to:

- expect more from you and help you reach challenging targets
- develop the curriculum in the sixth form so that it meets your needs and interests
- make sure that teaching is good enough to enable you to work as hard as you can in every subject and get good examination results.

I am sure that if you all work together you can make the necessary improvements.

Thank you again for helping us with our work and making our visit to your school so enjoyable.