

Townley Grammar School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101463
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	286070
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1472
6th form	415
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Patterson
Headteacher	Mrs L Hutchinson
Date of previous school inspection	11 February 2002
School address	Townley Road Bexleyheath DA6 7AB
Telephone number	020 8304 8311
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Townley Grammar School for Girls, a specialist Performing and Visual Arts College, serves students from well beyond the local area. Around a quarter of students, higher than average, come from a wide spectrum of minority ethnic heritages but none is at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is low as is the number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. A very small number of boys are admitted to the sixth form.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Townley Grammar School for girls is a good performing and visual arts college. The majority of parents strongly support the school's successful drive to promote achievement through 'academic, creative and athletic endeavours', while at the same time 'creating a community which values and cares for all individuals'.

A strength of the school, sustained since the last inspection, is the emphasis on encouraging positive relationships. Students, thus, behave exceptionally well, attend very regularly, enjoy learning and the rich opportunities for out-of-hours activities, especially in music, drama and dance. Students of all ages, but particularly sixth formers, show a high motivation to achieve well. Their personal development is outstanding. Students know how to choose healthy lunches and snacks and are aware of the implications of poor nutrition. With the improvement in accommodation since the last inspection, participation in physical activities is now high. Students enjoy the before-school yoga, the new fitness suite and the opportunities for dance, including Chinese fan dancing. They take responsibilities such as peer mentoring, sports ambassadors and prefect duties seriously and give very generously of their time to support charities and a range of arts productions.

Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being and for the next stage of education. Standards are well above average and academic progress is good between Years 7 and 11 although not enough students gain the highest A* and A GCSE grades across all subjects. Close to 80% of Year 11 students regularly move into the sixth form where they make excellent progress with approximately three quarters of students gaining the highest available A2 examination grades. The school places great importance on providing an inclusive ethos that cares for and guides students well. As a result, all groups of students achieve equally well. Nevertheless, the school rightly recognises that in some subjects, teachers do not consistently check well enough on students' learning in lessons. Some lesson planning also restricts challenge and variety so that students have too few opportunities to learn independently. This is more frequent in classes for younger year groups and where departments do not consistently use the readily available information on target-setting.

The dedication and good leadership of the headteacher and the senior team, overall good teaching and learning, and the excellent curriculum, have underpinned the school's development since the last inspection. Supportive, good governance has also contributed to the school's progress and clear sense of direction as a specialist college. Well-managed building projects have improved accommodation and resources significantly. The sixth form has increased in size yet examination results have continued to improve. A cycle of self-evaluation is embedded in the school year and is broadly accurate at whole school level. The school has clearly demonstrated that it has a good capacity to improve, summed up succinctly by a parent, 'We have made the right choice for our daughter'.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Townley sixth form is a thriving learning community. Provision for its students is outstanding. Standards have risen significantly since the last inspection, demonstrating its strong capacity to improve further. By Year 13, students achieve exceptionally well from their starting points at the end of Year 11. Checks on current students' progress indicate continuing improvement

because of the high priority given to ensuring they meet their challenging targets. Students are particularly successful in classical civilisation, English, physics and dance, reflecting the school's specialist status.

The majority of students who move on to the sixth form, remain to complete their courses and proceed to the universities of their choice. Students new to the school are inducted well so that they quickly feel at home. Students enjoy the vast range of academic subjects and the 'amazing opportunities for enrichment'. They enjoy learning because of teachers' subject expertise and know exactly what is expected of them and how to improve their work.

There is a strong emphasis on supervised study and this, together with the high level of personal care, contributes very effectively to success in the sixth form. As one student commented, teachers 'have always got time to speak to you.' Students receive very good advice about future courses and work opportunities. They are guided well in their university and job applications. Many sixth formers willingly take on a range of responsibilities within school and provide excellent support for younger students. They make their views known through the active sixth form council. They have been responsible for an innovative project to fund a school in India and a fun run to support the local hospice. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent. They appreciate that they are expected to respond maturely and this fosters independence and initiative. Many staff members have made valuable contributions to improvements in the sixth form which is well led.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the proportion of students gaining A* and A GCSE grades across all subjects.
- Ensure teaching makes more consistent use of assessment to ensure greater challenge to promote students' independence, particularly in younger year groups.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Standards are well above average in the main school and in the sixth form. All groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, achieve well overall. Students enter the school with high starting points and their progress accelerates as they move up through the year groups. The school has sustained the already good Year 9 and 11 test and examination results at the time of the last inspection. In 2007, post-16 results were the best ever.

Almost all students regularly achieve five or more higher GCSE grades that include English and mathematics. Despite these encouraging results, however, the proportion of students gaining the highest A* and A grades has varied from year-to-year and was just under half of the year group in 2007. These results highlight that students do not achieve equally well in all subjects and that not all reach the school's challenging targets. Very successful subjects at Year 11 include mathematics and theatre studies, reflecting the school's specialist status. In 2007, however, too many of these students did not achieve well enough in science. At Year 9, students' achievement also varies from subject to subject. Mathematics results well exceeded those of English and science because students are keen to attain the highest Level 8, not available in English and science. The school rightly recognises that more students should achieve a greater proportion of the highest available grades in some subject areas. Regular checks on current students' progress indicate that a higher percentage of Year 11 students are likely to gain A* and A GCSE grades in 2008.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development, is outstanding. Students develop into confident, mature and articulate young people as they move through the school. Many willingly take on a wide range of responsibilities within the school and know that their views are listened to and valued. Students also respect beliefs and cultures other than their own. They contribute actively to assemblies such as that for Remembrance Day.

Students enjoy school, their attendance is excellent and they are very appreciative of the exceptional range of opportunities offered to them. 'Fantastic' is how one student described the range of clubs and societies. Their high motivation to learn helps prepare them well for future education and working life as does their experience of year responsibilities in a wide range of situations. Many make a difference to others because of their excellent support for younger students. They also make very good use of the new facilities for physical education and are well aware of what to do to stay safe and keep healthy. Behaviour is excellent and students consider staff very approachable should rare problems arise.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Since the last inspection the school has sustained good teaching and learning. Accurate judgements by senior leaders on the quality of students' classroom experiences assist the spread of good practice across subjects.

Very knowledgeable teaching and enthusiasm for subjects is a common strength at Townley. This is reflected in students' high motivation to learn and positive attitudes to work. Harmonious working relationships also encourage students' confidence to ask and answer questions. The school is beginning to use its performing and visual arts specialism well to improve teaching. In an excellent science lesson, teaching drew very well on music and singing to reinforce students' understanding of chemical reactions. Despite these good features, not all teaching challenges all students well enough and in some subjects information on students' targets and progress is not yet used effectively enough in planning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school's outstanding curriculum meets the needs of students extremely well. The mainstream curriculum is enriched by extensive opportunities in music, drama, dance and art. All students follow at least one of these options throughout Years 10 and 11. They are actively encouraged to broaden their horizons through the truly exceptional range of out-of-hours activities and international links that include India, China and much of Europe. The extensive option choices at Year 10 provide excellent pathways into the sixth form. Students have access to very

worthwhile work experience opportunities and the personal development programme contributes much to their mature and confident approach to school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school keenly promotes students' all round development. Students are known well as individuals and are very well cared for throughout the school. This enables them to respond to challenges and opportunities and to achieve well. Safeguarding arrangements including child protection procedures are securely in place. The guidance for students on the next stages of education or employment is generally good and particularly strong in older year groups. Academic guidance and target setting are good overall, but the school rightly recognizes that subjects vary markedly in how effectively they use assessment information to support students' progress. Heads of year make a difference to individuals through regular checks on their progress and welfare. Links with parents and others, such as the medical services, are excellent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good because the headteacher and the senior leaders sustain an ethos of high expectation, high standards and good achievement within a well-ordered and caring community. There is a strong commitment to the provision of a broad range of experiences for students outside of the formal curriculum that very effectively promotes their all round development. This vision is shared by governors and staff and much appreciated by parents and students. The performing and visual arts specialism is well-led by the headteacher and senior team and lies at the heart of the school's future planning.

Through consultation and training, senior leadership places significant trust in middle leaders and allows them much autonomy. However, although departmental self-evaluation is developing, there is still inconsistency in how well subjects use assessment information to promote students' learning and in how effectively teaching and learning are monitored. This is reflected in students' variable success in subjects across the curriculum. Senior leaders have rightly identified that ensuring the impact of target-setting on learning is a priority for further school development.

Staffing and resources are very efficiently deployed to achieve excellent value for money. The new specialist science and performing arts buildings make a significant difference to the quality of the learning environment. Governance is good. Governors visit regularly, are very committed to the school, and both challenge and support its work well.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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?	1	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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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

20 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Townley Grammar School for Girls, Bexleyheath, DA6 7AB

After our visit to Townley, we would like to share our findings with you and thank you for your friendly welcome and for taking time to talk to us. You tell us that the school is 'great' and we agree with you. Townley is a good school. We are very pleased that you enjoy it so much, attend very regularly, and make the most of the wide opportunities available to you. You are very appreciative not only of the good teaching, but are also really keen on music, drama, dance and art and the wide range of clubs.

The school looks after you well. You are fortunate to learn in such a calm and ordered environment. You tell us that you feel safe and that there is always someone to turn to when you need help. You speak highly of your teachers' readiness to assist you. Many of you make a difference to your peers through support for younger students. Because of the hard work of your dedicated headteacher and senior team, of the governors, and of your very committed teachers you are achieving well. This opens the door to a wide range of further educational and training opportunities both at Year 11 and at the end of the very successful sixth form.

Because you cooperate so well with what your school is trying to do for you, we are convinced that you will continue to support your teachers' efforts and go from strength to strength in developing your personal skills as well as your academic prowess. We have asked your teachers to ensure that you are able to achieve more of the highest possible grades in all subjects. We have also asked them to make sure each of you is challenged sufficiently in all lessons.

We wish all of you at Townley a very successful future.

Sheila Nolan

Lead inspector