



Sir William Borlase's Grammar School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110515
Local Authority Buckinghamshire
Inspection number 288699
Inspection dates 5–6 February 2007
Reporting inspector Mary Hoather HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)	School address	West Street
School category	Voluntary controlled		Marlow
Age range of pupils	11–19		SL7 2BR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01628 816500
Number on roll (school)	1019	Fax number	01628 816501
Number on roll (6th form)	350		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Garry Concoran
		Headteacher	Dr Peter Holding
Date of previous school inspection	24 February 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–19	5–6 February 2007	288699

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by a team of four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Sir William Borlase's is a heavily oversubscribed, mixed, selective school in the centre of Marlow. It was awarded arts specialist status in September 2005. Students are predominantly White British with just under ten percent from a range of ethnic groups. Very few students have learning difficulties or use English as an additional language. The school has a high level of stability in its student population and the majority of students come from backgrounds of considerable advantage. The school has benefited from a recently completed building housing design technology, information technology and performing arts.

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 with some outstanding features. Its friendly, supportive ethos enables students to flourish as independent learners and responsible citizens who regularly enact the school's motto of 'lending a helping hand'. The main school provides a good standard of education with students making good progress from Years 7 to 11. Standards achieved at the end of Year 9 and 11 are as expected from the school's selective intake and are exceptionally high in relation to national averages.

Students arrive at the school with exceptionally high levels of attainment and very good parental support, and are motivated to learn and do well. As the excellent attendance verifies, most students enjoy school and display high levels of engagement particularly when actively involved in their learning and the life of the school. The curriculum is outstanding with an extensive range of options for students at all key stages. The excellent tracking and target setting practices now in place mean that students are very aware of their progress and what they should be achieving. Students are supported very well academically and pastorally. The introduction of new Learning Mentors and the electronic learning platform 'First Class' are starting to have a noticeable impact on students' learning.

Students respond confidently and enthusiastically to the excellent, developing range of extra-curricular activities, particularly those offered through sport and the arts. The effective school council and house and prefect systems offer many opportunities for students to experience leadership on a daily basis. A combination of students' high motivation, independence in learning and very good subject specialists leads to good teaching and learning overall and the good academic results. The quality of teaching can be variable, however, and teachers' planning does not always take into account the range of tasks needed, particularly in challenging the most able in all subjects.

The headteacher and governors have spent considerable time and energy over the last few years in realising their vision to 'Build a Better Borlase'. With very good financial support from parents, students now enjoy a new block housing three subject areas and a multi-purpose theatre space. With the well maintained, historic, older buildings, the whole site now offers an attractive learning environment.

Leadership and management are good overall. The senior leadership team and governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They have processes for self-evaluation and performance management at all levels but the monitoring of teaching and the role of middle leadership as a team are insufficiently developed. As key partners, parents' views are being sought but their concerns are not always listened to or responded to effectively by school leaders. With the recent appointments at senior and middle leadership level, the school's capacity to improve is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding. Standards are well above average at AS and A level and the achievement of both boys and girls is excellent. An excellent curriculum offers students a wide range of subjects and confidently meets their needs. Teaching is outstanding. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, set clear objectives, utilise a wide variety of resources and challenge students to achieve their best. Students' attitudes are similarly impressive. They discuss maturely and confidently in lessons and display exemplary levels of commitment and interest. Independent learning skills are particularly well-developed and students are very well prepared for higher education by the excellent guidance available.

Students play an extremely active part in the wider life of the school and community, as a result of the wide range of opportunities provided. The range of sports and arts activities is exceptional. Programmes such as the Community Sports Leaders and Arts Awards are highly-valued by students and help produce well-rounded, reflective and confident individuals. Younger students appreciate the support and guidance of their older peers both in lessons and tutor times and the sixth form students act as excellent role models across the school.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. There is a clear focus on high standards and students are very well-prepared for public examinations through rigorous and purposeful assessment. The sixth form provides excellent value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Monitor the quality of teaching more systematically and robustly.
- Listen and respond more effectively to parents' concerns.
- Provide the highest levels of challenge for all students, particularly the most able in Years 10 and 11.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students enter the school with exceptionally high standards in line with its selective intake. Standards remain exceptionally high at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. Test and examination results have been at this high level for a number of years and some subjects have shown improvements more recently.

Achievement in the main school is good overall. By the end of Year 9 progress is consistently good. Progress in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. It is good overall from Year 7 to Year 11. The proportion of students achieving five or more A*-C grades including English and mathematics is outstanding at 98%. Achievement in English is exceptionally high in all key stages and in mathematics in Years 9 and 11. The proportion of the highest grades achieved in most subjects in Year 11 far exceeds the national averages with some subjects such as music and English literature securing

91% and 82% A or A* grades respectively. Boys and girls overall do equally well in all key stages. Some students, especially higher attainers, however, do not achieve as well as they could in Years 10 and 11 in some subjects.

Standards in the sixth form are exceptionally high and achievement is outstanding.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Inspectors agree with the school that the personal development and well-being of the students are outstanding. They act responsibly and take a full part in the many opportunities offered to them. Most students enjoy their education considerably, as reflected in their excellent attendance, and they are punctual, considerate and polite. The behaviour of the majority is excellent, but there is a small number, mostly in Year 11, who occasionally disrupt lessons and detract from their own learning and that of their peers.

Students feel safe and say that any concerns that they have will be addressed swiftly. They take regular exercise through the many activities on offer and many choose healthy eating options. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They develop their spiritual and cultural awareness extremely well through subjects such as religious education, dance, drama, English and history. Regular chapel assemblies on site afford particular opportunities for community reflection. Students' social and moral awareness is very high as a result of a thorough pastoral programme. They participate well in the life of the school through the school council and the vast majority participate in extra-curricular activities.

Students make an excellent contribution to the local community as sports leaders to primary schools, through visiting the elderly and by raising large amounts for charities of their own choice. Older students advise younger ones as peer mentors and the house and prefect systems promote high levels of leadership skills throughout the school. Students are very well prepared for the workplace through high standards of literacy and numeracy and through excellent careers and university guidance. The proportion of students who complete their courses is exceptionally high, as is the numbers who continue their education beyond Year 11 and to university.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. A combination of highly motivated students, teachers who have very good subject knowledge and very good relationships,

leads to effective learning and good academic results. Teachers use resources, including information technology well.

Most teachers have high expectations of students and, because they want to do well, most students are fully engaged in their work and display high levels of independence in their learning. Most lessons are well structured and get off to a good start with clear learning objectives. Teachers are not always prepared, however, with tasks to suit the needs and interests of all students, particularly those that will challenge or interest the most able students in Years 10 and 11. Homework is used to extend and reinforce learning well although there are some inconsistencies in the quality of marking across the school. Lesson planning and delivery are not consistent enough and Inspectors agree with parents' concerns about inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in the main school.

Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding and marked by excellent opportunities for students to express their ideas and consolidate understanding through probing questioning which promotes curiosity and confidence.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum provision is outstanding. There are good breadth and depth to the subjects studied and the curriculum successfully meets the needs of most students. All statutory requirements are met, although a lack of suitable accommodation for food technology means provision has to be made off site. As a result of its specialist status, the school places a high prominence on the arts in Years 7 to 9. This has significantly increased choice and opportunity for students and these subjects have proved extremely popular. Levels of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are well developed in all subjects and there is an excellent programme of careers education.

Inspectors agree with parents that there is a 'stunning' range of extra-curricular opportunities across the school. Sports, arts and music are particularly well-catered for and the school offers an enormous range of after-school clubs in which the vast majority of students take part. There are well-developed opportunities for students to take on leadership roles across the school and subjects such as critical thinking successfully support students' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Staff provide outstanding care for students. The recently appointed team of six Learning Mentors is a strength of the school. Their developed role provides outstanding support for students. Child protection measures are securely in place. Students' individual needs are appropriately identified and conveyed to all relevant staff. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities are effectively guided and supported and the newly

developed electronic learning platform is starting to support all students well in their learning. The matron and school counsellor support vulnerable students very well. There is very good guidance on careers and university choice. The tracking of students' academic progress to raise standards is exemplary and the new 'Review Day' for target setting with students and parents was considered to be very successful.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are good. The strategic development of the school as a specialist arts college has considerably enhanced facilities and opportunities for students. The headteacher and governors have been very well supported by parents in securing additional funds for the 'Building a Better Borlase' building project over the last few years. This has culminated in the completion in 2006 of a new block housing the design technology, information technology and performing arts department, including a multi-purpose theatre space. An ongoing maintenance programme has also ensured that the older buildings have remained in a good state of repair, with the whole site offering an attractive learning environment.

Parents, as key partners, are kept informed through regular newsletters and are now consulted regularly through annual questionnaires. Parents provide valuable monitoring information about the quality of teaching but their views are not always effectively incorporated into planning for improvement and the school needs to improve its communication with them.

The recent training and developing accountability of middle leaders is starting to have impact. There is a cycle of subject reviews but the monitoring of teaching, although it takes place, is not yet rigorous or robust enough. There is a recognition that key issues such as maximising the progress of all students in Years 10 and 11 could be enhanced by sharing common practices and that the middle leadership team is instrumental in that. The way the development of the electronic learning platform is being led, with representatives from all subjects, provides a very good model for this way of working across the school.

As a result of the evolving self-evaluation processes, the senior leadership team and governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and are clear about what still needs to be done. The current focus on developing the role of middle leaders and the recent appointments at senior and middle leadership levels show that the school's capacity to improve is good.

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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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

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 behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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	1
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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
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	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	1	
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

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for making us very welcome and helping us with the inspection.

We were very impressed by many aspects of your school. Most of you and many of your parents told us how much you enjoy school and how good you think your school is. We have taken these views into account in arriving at our judgements. We are delighted to tell you that you are right to feel so happy at your school, as it provides a good education for you and has many outstanding features including your sixth form.

The main strengths are:

- the very high standards you attain at all key stages
- the excellent way your progress is being monitored and how well you know where you are and what you should be achieving
- your generally good behaviour around school and in lessons
- your overall personal development and well-being as you become young adults in the school
- your commitment and independence in learning
- the good quality of teaching overall and excellent sixth form teaching
- the outstanding range of courses and opportunities you have
- the way you work with and help others outside your own school
- the very good relationships between you and the staff
- the outstanding guidance and support you get
- your wonderful school site and new buildings.

We have asked the school to do three things that would help you to achieve even higher:

- to monitor the quality of lessons better
- to pay more attention to the concerns your parents have
- to challenge you all more, particularly the most able of you in all subjects in Years 10 and 11.

With best wishes to you all for your continuing successful education at Sir William Borlase's and in your careers beyond.

Mary Hoather AI