

# The Gryphon School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113890
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	289757
<b>Inspection dates</b>	22–23 May 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mary Massey HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1401
6th form	303
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Nigel Rees
<b>Headteacher</b>	Steve Hillier
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 February 2003
<b>School address</b>	Bristol Road Sherborne DT9 4EQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01935 813122
<b>Fax number</b>	01935 816992

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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The Gryphon School is an over-subscribed, larger than average comprehensive school. It is the only state provider of secondary education in the country town of Sherborne. There are strong community links as a result of business and enterprise specialist status which was awarded to the school in 2004. The majority of students are White British, and there are few students receiving free school meals or who have English as an additional language. There is a specialist unit for students with dyslexia which means that the proportions of students with learning difficulties or disabilities or with statements of special educational need are higher than average.

Little Gryphons Nursery, a children's daycare provider for 42 children up to the age of five, is managed by the school's governors and operates from premises on the school site.

## 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 great school!' This is the way one student responded when asked to describe the Gryphon School, and his friends agreed. Inspectors judge it to be a good school and have identified some outstanding features. Students feel safe and well cared for both by teachers and by support staff. This creates a happy, healthy and cooperative atmosphere which ensures that students enjoy their education and are motivated to achieve well. They are pleased to be able to make a useful contribution to the life of the school and the community, both as individuals and through an extremely effective school council, which was, for example, recently involved in the appointment of two new senior members of staff. Business and enterprise specialist status and the school's links with the Church of England both assist in cultivating a very productive relationship with the local community. The school also works very cooperatively with the local independent schools.

Students make good progress and achieve above average standards in examinations as a result of good teaching. Progress and standards for younger students are less good in English than in other subjects and, although boys achieve as well as girls in tests at the end of Year 9, they do less well at GCSE. Teaching is generally good and some teaching is outstanding but the quality across the school is inconsistent. In some lessons, the work is not matched well to students' needs and there are insufficient opportunities for students to be actively involved in either their learning or the assessment of their progress. When this is the case, students are either not adequately challenged or they lose interest and behave less well. In those lessons where assessment and feedback are thorough, students understand how well they are doing and exactly what they need to do in each subject to improve.

The school's business and enterprise specialist status has a considerable effect on the curriculum, the variety of activities provided outside the classroom and the impressive range of links with local organisations and businesses. The curriculum is outstanding and provides a very wide and exceptional range of opportunities for students which prepare them very well for the future.

The new headteacher has a clear vision for the school and has made substantial plans for improvement, taking account of the views of staff, students and governors. As a result of a recent parental survey and conversations with staff and students, he understands the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. Despite this, some parents feel that communication from the school could be better and some have concerns about the quality of information they receive about their child's progress. He is developing more robust systems for monitoring performance in order to lead towards more effective evaluation and planning, although middle managers are not yet involved or contributing sufficiently to ensure successful implementation. There is a confident, optimistic atmosphere in the school amongst staff, students and governors. Standards and achievement have been sustained since the appointment of the new headteacher and the progress made since his appointment indicates that capacity to improve is good.

## Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The sixth form meets the needs of its students well. Students themselves speak highly of their sixth form experience, especially the quality of teaching they receive, the help and support provided by staff and the good relationships that develop in a friendly but hard-working

environment. They show pride in the school and commitment to it by their active participation in many aspects of school and community life.

The profile of the sixth form has been raised since the last inspection so that it attracts more students both from within the school and from outside. Monitoring of students' progress is sufficiently rigorous for underachievement to be spotted early and dealt with quickly. Regular review and stringent evaluation of initiatives take place so that there is accurate measure of their effectiveness. As a result, students are achieving well and standards are expected to rise.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- ensure that the outstanding practice which is evident in many lessons is extended more consistently across the school
- ensure consistency in both the quality of feedback and the setting of subject-specific targets so that students know how well they are doing and what they have to do in order to improve further
- ensure that middle managers have the opportunities and skills to play a significant role in developing and implementing the vision of the school
- improve communication with parents so they feel that their suggestions and concerns are acted on.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Achievement and standards are good in both the main school and the sixth form. Students enter the school with average ability but they make good progress. Consequently, by the end of Year 9, the standards they achieve are above average and this level is maintained to the end of Year 11. Results of the tests at the end of Year 9 in 2006 were above average in mathematics and science although they were just average in English. At GCSE in 2006, standards of attainment were above average, although the proportion of students achieving five or more grades A\* to C fell in comparison with the previous year. High standards were achieved in English, mathematics, art, business studies, history and languages. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities, particularly those with statements of special educational need, make good progress because of the quality of the support they receive and the appropriateness of the curriculum for them. However, the gap between the standards achieved by boys and the higher ones achieved by girls is wider than it is nationally. Current students are on track to meet challenging targets.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The personal development and well-being of the students is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Students are pleasant and cooperative, have good social skills and form positive relationships with teachers and support staff. They enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in the good and improving attendance rates this year. Students' commitment to the school is demonstrated by the fact that many take on a mentoring role, to help other students starting at the school, and sixth formers act as prefects and helpers attached to tutorial and year groups. Behaviour around the school site is good but some students become frustrated

if their progress in lessons is slowed when a small minority misbehave. There is a good understanding of how to respond to risks that they may encounter both in and out of school. Students rightly feel confident that staff will manage issues of bullying effectively and that their opinions are valued and heard. Students have an informed awareness of the importance of developing healthier lifestyles; for example, through action taken by their student council, healthier menus have been introduced. Participation in sports and other extra-curricular activities which promote healthier lifestyles is good. Business and enterprise status fosters excellent links both locally and globally, widening the pupils' knowledge and experiences. This makes their contribution to the community and the development of work place skills outstanding. Students have an excellent awareness and tolerance of other cultures and their beliefs, so they are prepared for life in a multi-cultural society. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and a keen sense of what is fair. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They would like more robust systems to deal with loss of personal property.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Teaching is good and, as a result, students' learning is also good. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 has improved since the last inspection. Students, school leaders and external agencies recognise that there is also some exemplary teaching but this outstanding practice is not used consistently to raise the quality of teaching of other staff. Students welcome an active approach to learning, particularly when teachers plan lessons to reflect their preferred methods. The best lessons reflect these attributes but students report that, on other occasions, there is too much talking by the teachers. Students lose focus and behave less well when the lessons' activities are not matched well to their needs. They sometimes feel frustrated when lessons are not sufficiently challenging and when rewards and sanctions are not used consistently.

The school has a focus on assessment strategies to raise the quality of teaching and learning. Many staff have responded well and elements of the strategy are clearly recognisable to good effect in their lessons. For example, in geography, students' work is not only assessed thoroughly but the students are given clear subject-specific guidance on what they need to do to reach the next level. However, there are still inconsistencies between departments and between individual staff in the quality of marking and feedback, the setting of targets and the provision of opportunities for students to assess their own work and that of other students.

Sixth form students are taught well. Students appreciate their teachers' knowledge and expertise and the support they receive both during and outside lessons, but they are also clear that they are encouraged to be responsible for their own learning.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum is broad and balanced and it is substantially enhanced by a range of activities arranged as special day events or outside normal school time. Personal and health education and citizenship are good. The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is exceptional, offering a very wide range of choices to meet the needs of all students. In addition to most of the

commonly offered GCSE courses, the students can study Latin or choose from three European languages. The range of vocational and work-related courses is outstanding. Specialist school status has an exceptional impact on the curriculum. It influences positively the provision in many subjects, provides coherence, and considerably improves students' preparation for their future economic well-being. The activities organised outside school to enrich the curriculum are outstanding in variety and quality. There are many clubs during lunchtime and after school. Specialist status again makes a substantial contribution through the exceptional links with many local businesses which involve themselves in a wide variety of projects with the school. There are many trips and residential visits and collaborative activities with other schools. For example, a production of *Romeo and Juliet* was mounted in partnership with local independent schools.

Provision in the sixth form is good. The range of both academic and vocational courses is appropriate and meets students' needs well.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory and good in the sixth form. Especially good features are the support for the students' personal development, particularly for those students who are in care and those with special educational needs. Great care is taken to know each student as an individual and to meet their needs. The school chaplain – described by some students as 'really cool' – provides support that is valued very much by students. Staff are successful in ensuring that students feel safe from issues such as bullying and racism. Procedures for students to move smoothly between various phases of their education are well managed and the students feel well guided in their choices. In the sixth form, students have clear guidance towards the most appropriate courses and they stay on them and achieve well. They benefit particularly from regular and rigorous monitoring of their progress through meetings, reviews, reports and contact with parents. In the main school, academic mentoring is not rigorous or consistent enough to ensure that all students have consistently good academic support or subject skill-specific targets that will enable them to make better progress.

All the required risk assessments are in place but no one person is responsible for ensuring that they are applied consistently. Procedures for safeguarding students meet government requirements.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Leadership and management are good. Strong leadership leads to good teaching and good achievement for students. The new headteacher has consulted governors, parents, staff and students about the strengths and weaknesses of the school in order to inform planning for the next academic year. This has led to the development of a shared vision for the future which is understood by all staff and reorganisation of roles and responsibilities in the leadership team. The leadership team and middle managers have made a thorough analysis of student data in order to identify reasons for underachievement. This has led to very focussed support for

students. Self-evaluation systems are satisfactory but are currently under review to ensure they are sufficiently focussed and evaluative to lead to effective strategies for improvement. There are inconsistencies in the way in which middle managers implement policies relating to assessment, feedback and target-setting.

In the sixth form, leadership and management provide students and staff with a clear focus on raising achievement and secure this by a rigorous programme of academic monitoring. The director of the sixth form promotes high standards within a secure and friendly environment so that students enjoy their experience at the school and make good progress.

Governors are loyal and supportive but also able to challenge the school's leaders. They welcome the opportunity to become more involved in the work of the school and are committed to the direction being set by the new headteacher.



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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	2	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	3	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	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	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

24 May 2007

Dear Students,

Inspection of The Gryphon School, Bristol Road, Sherborne DT9 4EQ

I would like to thank you for the helpful and friendly way in which you helped us during the inspection of your school on 22 and 23 May. It is a particularly happy place where many of you make a really valuable contribution to the school, particularly through the school council. As a result of its business and enterprise specialist status, the school has many useful relationships with organisations in the area around Sherborne. This gives you an outstanding selection of opportunities to develop skills that will be very useful to you in the future. You gain results above the national average because you are taught well and the school is effectively led and managed. You are very lucky to have such an interesting curriculum provided for you and a very wide range of activities to enjoy out of school hours.

Although much of the teaching is good and some of it is outstanding, we found that this is not the case in all lessons. Some of you feel you are not challenged enough and the work is too easy; others become bored and misbehave if the work is not sufficiently interesting. You learn best when teachers let you take part actively in lessons and the work is closely matched to your needs. Some teachers give you very thorough feedback so you know how well you are doing. They set clear subject- based targets so you know exactly what you have to do to improve. We have asked the headteacher to make sure that all lessons are as good as the best are now by using the skills and expertise of your best teachers.

Your new headteacher and the senior leaders have many plans for improving your school. We have asked them to make sure that heads of department and heads of year play a major role in this development. Some of your parents feel that they are not asked for their opinions often enough and that their suggestions are not always acted on, so we have asked your school to make sure that this improves too.

The Gryphon is a good school with some outstanding features. You need to take advantage of the many opportunities that it provides to make sure you are well prepared for future careers and further education. I do hope that some of you will read the full report. It can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,

Mary Massey Her Majesty's Inspector