



# Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School

Inspection Report

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education  
and care

**Unique Reference Number** 118789  
**Local Authority** Kent  
**Inspection number** 291257  
**Inspection dates** 26–27 February 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Patricia Metham 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>	Grammar (selective)	<b>School address</b>	Southfield Road
<b>School category</b>	Foundation		Tunbridge Wells
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		TN4 9UJ
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls	<b>Telephone number</b>	01892 520902
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	943	<b>Fax number</b>	01892 536497
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	229		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Jane Granatt
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Linda Wybar
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	29 January 2001		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	26–27 February 2007	291257

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

This is a medium-sized, academically selective school for girls, which draws its students mainly from areas of relative affluence in Kent. Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion eligible for free school meals is well below average. Students join the school with high levels of attainment. Very few have a learning difficulty or disability. Entry to the sixth form is dependent on prior academic achievement.

## 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 several outstanding features. The immediate and lasting impression is of a happy and busy place where there is, according to parents, 'always a buzz'. The headteacher has the confidence of the staff, the students and an overwhelming majority of parents. Students in all years speak very positively about her accessibility and her active concern for their well-being. She is the first to point out that the success of the school, whether judged on its academic record or the personal development of its students, reflects the shared commitment and professionalism of governors and staff. The senior leadership team works well, overseeing the day-to-day management of the school and giving immediate 'hands on' support wherever needed. The school has clearly benefited from the varied and high-level expertise, the rigorous but supportive monitoring and the sustained involvement of its governing body, strongly led by its exceptionally well informed and incisive chair. There has also been sustained and well-focused support from the local authority. In recent years, outstanding governance, sound financial management and a clear understanding of the school's potential as well as its areas for improvement have set priorities for staffing, curriculum and facilities which have enabled the school to thrive. Problems and opportunities have been quickly recognised and decisive action taken; for example, pockets of weaknesses in teaching and learning have been identified and well-targeted support and monitoring arrangements set up. Opportunities for the sixth form have been extended through a mutually beneficial collaboration with two neighbouring boys' schools.

Achievement is good overall, and outstanding in the sixth form. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9, and in GCSE and A-level examinations, are well above national averages. Students work productively with others and respond cheerfully to opportunities for independent thinking, research and problem-solving. In many subjects, attention is paid to individual learning styles to help students fulfil their potential. However, some lessons do not get off to a quick enough start. There is good support for those few students with specific learning disabilities or difficulties, so they do as well as their contemporaries. On some occasions, less confident or relatively less able students are allowed to be too dependent on others rather than being required to acquire independent learning skills and to develop and present their own ideas and conclusions. The school is aware of this; steps have been taken to ensure that regular assessment leads to manageable but challenging personal targets for all students, with their progress being carefully monitored. The impact of this can be seen in most departments, but good practice is not yet consistently embedded.

The school community is built on mutual respect and care, an understanding of the need for healthy living, concern for the safety and well-being of students and staff, and a very realistic grasp of the combination of qualifications and skills needed to prepare students for their future. There are excellent and popular opportunities for students of all ages to make a positive contribution to the life of the school and to the community beyond, through taking on responsibilities, joining the school council and participating in voluntary work locally and overseas. The value is recognised of

experiences beyond the classroom, such as expeditions overseas, field study trips, theatre visits and sports tours. Departments accommodate and support each other in developing a broad and varied programme, which the students greatly enjoy and clearly benefit from.

The school's determination to provide a multi-faceted and imaginative education is widely understood and appreciated. This reflection by parents about their daughter is characteristic of many: 'She has grown into an empathetic, caring, hard-working young lady of whom we are very proud and much of this can be attributed to her school'.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 1**

The large majority of students in the sixth form regularly achieve or surpass challenging academic targets because they have excellent support and guidance in their work. Teaching is good and contributes to the success of students; however, the school is aware that a wider range of teaching styles would help students to achieve even more. Students value their teachers' commitment; as one said, 'The best teachers are passionate about their subjects – they care!'

Students play a full part in a wide range of activities, both in school and in the wider community, including trips to Africa and India. Consequently, their understanding of other cultures is excellent. They are actively involved in an outstanding choice of extra-curricular clubs and societies and this contributes to the school's air of cheerful purposefulness. Students are confident, highly motivated individuals who are willing to contribute to all aspects of school life, including mentoring younger pupils. Their views are listened to and acted upon very well.

The excellent curriculum is enriched through links with neighbouring schools. Leadership and management of the sixth form are very strong; issues such as underperformance are resolved speedily. Much credit for this success can be given to the deputy head (curriculum) who, supported by the deputy head (pastoral), has taken the sixth form under his wing pending the arrival of a newly-appointed Director of Achievement. Career guidance and preparation for life in higher education and beyond are excellent.

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

- Ensure that all lessons engage and actively involve learners from the very outset.
- Achieve consistency of good practice in using assessment to set appropriate and challenging targets for all learners.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

Achievement – the progress students make – is good overall and exceptionally good in the sixth form. Academic standards are outstanding. Selection for entry is on

academic ability and standards are high. By the end of Year 9, students have made excellent progress. Their results in national tests are notably higher than the national averages in English, mathematics and science. The rate of progress in Years 10 and 11 is good and builds on strong foundations laid in previous years. The very few who have learning difficulties or disabilities generally achieve as well as other students. In 2006, 99% of those entered for GCSE achieved at least five subjects at grades A\*-C, including English and mathematics. This was significantly above the national average of 45%. At A level, the pass rate (A-E) was just under 99%, with 49% at grade A, which exceeded the results of earlier years.

There is a well-directed drive towards systematic analysis of performance data and use of assessment to enhance progress, with evidence in all departments that these systems have been worked into marking, feedback and target-setting. However, despite much good practice, marking is not consistently supported by clear guidance for individual students on how to move up to the next level.

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

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Attendance is well above average because students enjoy school and want to do well. Behaviour is excellent; students are polite, friendly, mature and thoughtful. They are very supportive of each other and feel safe. Bullying, they say confidently, is rare and dealt with quickly and effectively if it happens. School council members take their responsibilities seriously and feel their suggestions are listened to and acted upon whenever possible.

Students make healthy choices, participating in an extensive range of sports, and eating and drinking sensibly. They develop a thoughtful understanding of issues related to sex, drugs and smoking and acquire strategies to help them cope with stress and other emotional issues. Their care for their own and others' safety is clear in lessons and around the school.

Through wide-ranging opportunities for voluntary work at home and abroad, students take on responsibility for the well-being of others and develop a personal appreciation of global cultures and priorities. Their confidence is developed through activities such as music, drama and debating, and they learn how to combine initiative with teamwork through opportunities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and cultural exchanges. High standards and well developed skills, complemented by work experience and a very strong work ethic, ensure students are extremely well prepared for their future economic well-being.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

##### Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall, teaching is good. Very positive relationships between teachers and students contribute to the strong learning culture evident within lessons. Students really appreciate the support they are given: 'Teachers are helpful and give up their time to help us'.

The school has a wealth of data to track learners' progress. Recent initiatives have strengthened the use of assessment to enhance learning, although not all teachers are consistently using available data to plan lessons that will meet the needs of every learner.

Progress is particularly good when lessons begin with energy and are well paced, teachers radiate knowledgeable enthusiasm for their subject and students are encouraged to share responsibility for their learning. Varied teaching and learning styles meet individual needs and interests. In a minority of lessons, students make less progress because they are not actively involved from the outset and sometimes insufficient time is given for them to review and consolidate their learning at the end of a lesson. The current staff development initiative on coaching for teachers is creating a renewed focus on good classroom practice that will benefit learners.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 1

##### Grade for sixth form: 1

Curriculum provision at this school is outstanding throughout, combining traditional academic strengths with an exceptional range of additional activities. All statutory requirements are met. Opportunities for work-related learning are being extended; the school recognises this is an area needing wider development. The most able students are significantly challenged through, for example, being able to study three separate sciences from Year 8 onwards. All are studying three languages by the end of Year 9 and may then continue with them. Sixth form options are extended through collaboration with two neighbouring schools. The offer and uptake of extra-curricular activities is impressive. There is a range of trips offered including to India, Ghana and France; students who could not otherwise afford to take part are supported through the school's Southfield fund. This breadth of opportunity makes a very positive contribution to students' development, enjoyment, confidence and overall learning.

## Care, guidance and support

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Care, guidance and support are good overall and outstanding in the sixth form. Very effective induction procedures and links with local primary schools help Year 7 pupils settle in quickly. Year 8 'buddy support' is much appreciated. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are secure. Pupils say they feel safe and there is always someone to turn to if they need help. Careers advice is good, and is being further improved. Students are well advised about option choices, which are well matched to their individual needs. The school works successfully with external support agencies when necessary and makes good use of their expertise to support students with learning difficulties or disabilities. As a result, these students achieve well. Systems for monitoring students' academic progress are being developed further; recently-appointed Directors of Achievement can quickly identify and support individuals or groups of pupils who are not making sufficient progress. The full impact of this initiative is yet to be seen. Teachers ensure students know how well they are achieving and, on the whole, what steps they need to take to improve. Parents are informed promptly of any concerns.

## Leadership and management

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Leadership and management are good overall, with significant strengths, and outstanding in the sixth form. In leading the school successfully through a process of review and development, the headteacher has had outstanding guidance and support from the school governors, who act both as 'critical friends' and as active and well-informed collaborators in school improvement. There has also been strong support from the local authority. Financial management is secure, both in its strategic planning and its day-to-day operation and monitoring. The school achieves outstanding value for money.

Although the headteacher is the driving force for change and management, the capacity of senior and middle management is being developed steadily, with some managers rising more quickly and effectively to the challenge than others. The introduction of an Academic Board and the redefining of middle management responsibilities – such as those of the Directors of Achievement – are encouraging a collegiate approach and clearly established accountability. The two deputies, assistant headteacher and bursar are highly competent and work well as a senior leadership team. There is evidence within departments of a shared vision for the school and careful monitoring of the ways in which it is put into effect. There is much good practice but it is not consistent across all departments.

The capacity of leadership and management to improve this already good school is outstanding; they know their school well and are adept at prioritising areas for



improvement or support. There is a readiness to seize opportunities which will extend and enhance provision for the school's students. Students' cheerful and confident sense of purpose and the very high standards they attain are evidence of how well leadership and management are putting into effect their shared aspiration: 'We want to pursue the notion of excellence in the wider curriculum'.

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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>	<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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
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	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
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

<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	1
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	1

<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.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
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	1	
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 for the unfailingly cheerful and courteous way you made us feel welcome when we came to see how well your school is doing. It was a delight to find you all so positive about the opportunities you have to achieve academic success and to develop a wide range of interests and skills. We were impressed by the loyalty and commitment you showed to your school and how happy you are to be part of it. The fact that most of you have already chosen, or will choose, to stay on into the sixth form is evidence of the school's success in meeting your needs and supporting your ambitions.

Yours is a good school with some outstanding strengths. We saw evidence of good teaching and effective learning. Your good progress reflects not only your natural abilities but also the way in which assessments of your work and your potential are used by most of your teachers to set you challenging yet manageable targets. It is important that you have a clear idea of your own strengths and areas for improvement and that you know how to build on past achievement and to learn from mistakes. It is also important that you become independent learners, able to select and analyse information, to develop well-informed views and to present them persuasively. Some, but not all, of you have already achieved that. It was good to hear that you feel safe in school, unlikely to be bullied but confident that quick and effective action would be taken if you did have difficulties. You feel that your views are taken seriously and that each of you can make a positive contribution to the life of the school. We liked your enthusiastic participation in an impressive range of clubs and activities, and the way you take up opportunities to help others both locally and overseas.

We have suggested to the school that you will do even better if all lessons start off in a way that captures your attention and actively involves you. We have also recommended that the best examples of how assessment information is used to set targets for you should be more consistently matched throughout every department, so that you all fulfil your potential.

I wish you all continuing success and enjoyment.