

Weald of Kent Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118791
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291258
Inspection date	25 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Joan Greenfield

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1048
6th form	275
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Trevor Perkins
Headteacher	Sue Rowell
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2001
School address	Tudeley Lane Tonbridge TN9 2JP
Telephone number	01732 373500
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a selective grammar school that takes students from a wide catchment area. Students' attainment on entry is well above average, reflecting the selective nature of the school, although there is a wider range of attainment than is usually found in grammar schools. A small number of students have learning difficulties and disabilities. Relatively few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A small number of male students join the sixth form in Year 12. The school has had specialist status for languages since 1999.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Students thrive within its distinctive ethos that enables them to succeed academically and to mature into confident, well-rounded individuals who are effectively prepared for their future lives. The school's academic success is evident in the exceptionally high standards that students attain each year and in their achievement, which is outstanding in the school overall and good in the sixth form. The high quality of the teaching helps students to make very good progress, although their progress is not as consistent in a few subjects in the sixth form as it is in the main school.

There are many reasons for the school's success. The school's values and high aspirations are clearly reflected in the students' outstanding personal development and well-being. Their positive attitudes and enjoyment of learning, and their evident pride in being part of the school community, show in their willingness to participate in the wide range of opportunities provided for them, to take initiative and assume responsibility. The school's specialist status for languages makes a considerable contribution to students' personal development through its international ethos and links with many schools overseas. Students are friendly and courteous, and their behaviour is excellent. A key feature of the school's work is the high quality of care, guidance and support that students receive to enable them to grow and develop into responsible citizens, able to meet any challenges they may encounter with self-assurance. This quality of care is evident in the support given to a few students who are disaffected with aspects of their school life, enabling them to remain at school to gain academic qualifications. The students themselves are very appreciative of this support. As one said, 'Without it, I wouldn't be here'.

The school also shows considerable awareness of the needs of individual students, reflected in the way that the curriculum is being modified to suit their particular needs and aspirations. The system of early entry in Year 8 for the national tests and in Year 10 for GCSE examinations in religious education and French is providing greater flexibility to extend the opportunities available for students. Some students in Year 11 are currently studying AS courses, and they are responding very well to these additional challenges. Although there are many exemplary elements to the curriculum, it is currently good overall because students in Years 11 to 13 do not study religious education as legally required. Nevertheless, there are many opportunities for the students to develop their spiritual awareness through the curriculum as a whole.

The driving force behind the school's success is the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, who has a very clear view of how the school should develop. She is ably supported by the governors, the senior leadership group and other staff, so that leadership and management of the school are excellent. Teamwork and a sharp focus on doing the best for the students are evident in all that they do. Their understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development is accurate and the improvements made since the last inspection indicate that there is considerable capacity to improve further. An excellent spirit of partnership with parents and other agencies supports students' learning and well-being very well.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students gain much from being in the school's sixth form and receive an outstanding education. Retention rates are very high. Standards are well above average. Most students achieve very well because of the high quality of the teaching and the careful tracking of their progress, but

some inconsistency in their progress in a few subjects means that their achievement, despite these strengths, is good rather than outstanding. The exceptionally effective guidance and support they receive, enhanced by regular meetings with their academic tutors, ensure that students are on the right courses for their aspirations. Their personal development is outstanding, and the prefect system and their 'school officer' roles enable them to develop excellent leadership and team-working skills as these teams have genuine delegated responsibilities. Sixth form students are good role models for others in the school. The curriculum closely matches their needs and, whilst mainly academic, it is not divorced from the world of work, for example, with courses in product design and business studies. Leadership and management of the sixth form, in common with those of the main school, are excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve progress in a few subjects in the sixth form to bring them to the level of the majority.
- Fully meet statutory requirements for religious education in Years 11 to 13 and provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are exceptionally high and have been consistently so for the past three years. Students make very good progress and achieve extremely well when account is taken of their starting points. This reflects the school's aspirations and high expectations. Students are set challenging targets, although they do not always know them. Students' attainment on entry is well above average but the range of attainment is much wider than usually found in a selective school. In addition, the school has a relatively large number of students with specific learning difficulties and with social, behavioural and emotional needs. Even though these students receive very good levels of support, there is some variation in the progress that they make. Most do as well as their peers but a few do not achieve as well as they might, despite the school's efforts.

The school's GCSE results are exceptionally high, with almost every student gaining five or more grades A*–C including English and mathematics in 2006. For the last two years, students have taken the national tests at the end of Year 8, a year earlier than in most schools. This change has had a slight impact on the school's overall performance, but standards remain exceptionally high, as they have been for the last five years. Standards in the sixth form are well above average, and have been consistently so for the past five years.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students have great pride in their school and talk enthusiastically about what it offers them. They thrive in the positive atmosphere engendered by the school. Their attitudes, behaviour and relationships with one another and with adults are excellent. They are happy at school and enjoy their education, which is reflected in their high levels of attendance. The school's extensive opportunities, especially through its specialist status for languages, ensure that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is excellent. They have an effective voice in the school's development and make a particularly strong contribution to the school and wider community through the numerous opportunities they have to take responsibility and show

initiative. They participate with a real sense of purpose and commitment. Their understanding of the need to keep healthy and safe is excellent and levels of participation in the school's wide range of extra-curricular activities are very high. Students feel very secure at school and are confident that staff will help them if the need arises. They are extremely well prepared to meet the challenges that they will face as they grow older and enter the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The consistently high quality of the teaching ensures that students make rapid progress in their learning. Relationships are excellent and there is a shared sense of wanting to do the very best for each student. Teaching is typically thorough, with teachers using their extensive subject knowledge well to set challenging work for students. They also help students to develop the skills of working independently. Teachers question pupils well to check what they know and understand, effectively targeting their questions at individual students. In the most effective lessons, teachers are adept at asking searching, open-ended questions to make students think more deeply, and show a good capacity to listen carefully and build on students' answers, frequently extending their understanding and critical thinking skills. They give students extremely clear guidance on strategies to adopt during tests and examinations.

The use of rewards works well as a strategy for motivating students. A few teachers are not so successful at managing the enthusiasm of these highly able students, with the result that occasionally too much time is spent in getting them to conform to the school's expectations and dealing with off-task chatter. Work is thoroughly marked and students' learning is regularly assessed. The recording of these assessments and their use to inform subsequent planning and learning varies across subjects and teachers. In many cases it does not allow the students' progress to be monitored as robustly as it needs to be. The school is aware of this and is already revising its current system to ensure greater consistency across the school as a whole.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum students receive is extremely rich and varied, and supports their academic and personal development very well. It has many outstanding features and is innovative in its approach. Examples of this approach include the compression of the curriculum for younger students into two years, with the consequent flexibility and opportunities for breadth that this provides for older students. The opportunity for older students to take some GCSE examinations a year early gives them additional time to follow other courses, including AS courses, in Year 11. In addition, the allocation of specific 'alternative curriculum time' days throughout the year enables students to develop wider personal and social skills relating to enterprise, teamwork, finance and leadership. The curriculum also provides students with many opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Only the lack of explicit provision for religious education in Years 11 to 13 detracts from the otherwise high quality curriculum.

The school's specialist status as a language college is clearly reflected in its view of itself as an 'international' school. Extensive links with schools abroad, including exchange visits, are valuable

and support students' learning particularly well. These links help students to increase their cultural and political awareness as well as gain a clear understanding of citizenship issues. An extensive range of additional activities enhances the curriculum and extends students' interests and experiences very effectively, and has a considerable impact on their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students are valued highly as individuals and flourish both in their academic and personal development because of the high quality care, guidance and support they receive. The support given to those with additional needs, whether academic or personal, is first rate. It is valued by these students and backed by productive links with a wide range of agencies, enabling the students to cope more effectively with the school's high expectations. Procedures to ensure the health, safety and welfare of students are robust and the child protection arrangements are secure.

Learning managers effectively monitor students' progress on a regular basis and implement a range of intervention strategies as the need arises. The success of these strategies is reflected in the examination results of the students concerned. Personal targets and goals are identified for students, and are suitably challenging. Not all students are as aware of these targets as they might be but the school is modifying its current approach and its reporting systems to make these more explicit. Students receive excellent advice and guidance regarding their choices of subjects and they are particularly well prepared for the next stages in their education. This is shown in the very high numbers that transfer into the sixth form and from there into higher and further education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teamwork is a strong feature of the school's work and managers at all levels are clear about their roles and how they can each contribute to the school's overarching vision. This vision, which stresses the importance of developing 'rounded' students in terms of their academic and personal development, permeates the whole school and makes it a lively and purposeful community. The leadership of the headteacher has been instrumental over the years in providing the clear educational direction necessary to enable the school to become so successful. With the support of a very able senior team and the extremely strong contribution of the governing body, the headteacher has ensured a clear understanding amongst pupils, parents and staff of the school's priorities and its future direction. Relationships with parents are extremely positive, as seen in the analysis of the school's recent external survey of their views, and the school keeps them well informed about issues and developments. The school responds very effectively to the parents' concerns, is open in its approach, and evaluates critically any feedback from them.

Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate, as is the monitoring of the school's performance, and is used especially well to inform future priorities. The school's areas for development are clear and relevant. Governors work closely with staff to gain a deeper understanding of their areas

of responsibility. They support and challenge the school very effectively, closely monitoring its performance and progress towards meeting its identified priorities. Their extremely effective contribution to the success of the school is only marred by their failure to ensure that provision for a daily act of collective worship and religious education in Years 11 to 13 fully meets legal requirements. Finances are carefully managed and improvements to the school's accommodation are enhancing the quality of the school's provision.

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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>	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?	1	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

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
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	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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
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

26 April 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Weald of Kent Grammar School, Tonbridge TN9 2JP

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed our discussions with you and your comments and opinions helped to inform our judgements. This letter is to tell you what we found.

- You go to an outstanding school that helps you to achieve extremely well and reach exceptionally high standards in your work.
- You work hard and make excellent progress in your learning because of the high quality teaching.
- You are courteous and friendly to one another and to adults in the school.
- Your attitudes are extremely positive and you are developing well into mature and responsible young people, well prepared to deal with the challenges that may face you when you leave school.
- Staff give you exceptionally good levels of care, guidance and support to ensure that you get the most out of your time at school.
- The school provides you with a very wide range of curricular opportunities and other enrichment activities that are successful in enhancing your learning and your personal development.
- The school is outstandingly well led by the headteacher, senior staff and governors, who are committed to ensuring that the school continues to improve so that you all receive the very best opportunities to be successful.

The school has many outstanding features and relatively few areas for improvement. We have asked the school to do two things to improve the high quality of education that it offers you.

- Improve progress in a few subjects in the sixth form by increasing the level of challenge to students.
- Make sure that legal requirements are met in the provision of religious education in Years 11 to 13 and a daily act of collective worship for all.

We hope that you will continue to do your very best for the school to help it maintain its very high standards, and wish you well in your forthcoming examinations.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Joan Greenfield Lead inspector