

Tonbridge Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118915
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291286
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Sean Hanan HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	737
6th form	334
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Hubble
Headteacher	R Joyce
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2002
School address	Deakin Leas Tonbridge TN9 2JR
Telephone number	01732 365125
Fax number	01732 359417

Age group	11–18
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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 an average-size girls' grammar school with a large, mixed sixth form. Students come from a wide geographical area and are from approximately the top 25% of the ability range. The vast majority of students are White British. The large majority are materially advantaged, with very few being entitled to free school meals. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low. The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing and is the lead school in the local Leading Edge Partnership Programme.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

"I love being at this school – not just for the results but because of everything else that's going on!" This comment by a student sums up how most girls view their experience at Tonbridge Grammar. It is an outstanding school; it also has outstanding capacity to improve still further. Staff are fully committed to the development of every individual in a stimulating, safe and friendly environment in which students are valued and may thrive intellectually, emotionally and physically. Having been selected on the basis of their academic ability and potential, they make excellent progress from when they enter the school and reach very high standards by the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. Most teaching is good and a high proportion is outstanding; but students develop in a holistic way and much learning and achievement takes place beyond the formal curriculum. The curriculum is unusually flexible in the sense that students are entered for exams when it is appropriate for the individual, rather than following normal custom and practice. The tracking and monitoring of students' progress is exemplary and the support they receive from their teachers and tutors is outstanding.

The headteacher and her team provide outstanding leadership. They set, monitor and evaluate the direction and priorities for the school in a comprehensive and sharply self-critical way, thus ensuring that it provides outstanding value for money. It is an inclusive community that celebrates differences, but the active promotion of diversity across the curriculum is relatively underdeveloped and more could be done to broaden students' cultural experiences. The school accurately assessed its overall effectiveness as outstanding, although it underestimated the very high quality of some aspects of its work.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision in the sixth form is outstanding. Standards are in the top 5% nationally and students make outstanding progress in a wide variety of courses that includes critical thinking, financial literacy, philosophy and religion. The introduction of the International Baccalaureate for a large group of students has proved a great success, and contributes well to the school's aim of meeting the needs of every individual. Opportunities outside the classroom include work experience abroad, participation in sporting and cultural events at regional and national level, and ambitious visits overseas. Students speak with affection of their school and are highly appreciative of the outstanding care, support and friendship that their teachers extend to them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide students with more first-hand experience of diverse cultures and backgrounds in Britain.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Achievement and standards are outstanding. Test and examination results in Years 7 to 11 are well above the national average. Progress at Key Stage 3 English and science is close to that of high ability students nationally, but overall progress is much better than this because of the

school's culture of securing not only the highest grades, but also personal development and broader intellectual skills at the highest level.

Monitoring of progress is rigorous and exceptionally sensitive to individual needs. No student is barred from progressing by limitations in the curriculum, and support is provided swiftly and sensitively, helping students to meet very challenging targets. Students with learning difficulties are very well supported and make progress at the same rate as their peers. Exceptional talent is carefully nurtured, for example, in A-level mathematics in Year 7, or in musical and sporting achievements at the highest level. Many students progress so quickly that they gain the highest grades a year or more earlier than usual, enabling them to progress swiftly to more advanced study.

Throughout the school, outstanding relationships mean that students are able to work with their teachers on an equal footing, sharing in the joy and excitement of learning, and develop advanced interpersonal skills and the ability to think analytically and creatively.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They really enjoy coming to school: as one girl said, "People care and it's a nice place to work and learn." Attendance is above that of many other schools. Students become independent learners and have the confidence to learn by making mistakes. Behaviour is excellent both in lessons and around the school. Students confirm that bullying is rare and the school takes effective action if it does occur.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Students have a set of principles that inform their attitudes to life and society. They make very significant contributions to the running of their own school and there is a wide variety of ways in which the school ensures that their views are heard. There are regular school council meetings and the prefect system in the sixth form is designed to foster leadership. The house system is led by Year 11 students. Student forums contribute to judgements about the quality of subjects and questionnaires are used widely and effectively. Some students have been trained to observe lessons and others contribute towards the appointment of senior staff. The wide range of responsibilities and activities both in and outside school allows students to make a significant contribution to community life. Their opportunities to meet people from other cultures within Britain are more limited.

Students have a good understanding of a healthy lifestyle and a large number attend sports-based clubs and other activities. They know about safe practice in, for example, science lessons and are aware of dangers elsewhere. Students feel safe in school and are willing to speak to any adult if they need help. Their knowledge of the world of work is enhanced by good careers advice, work experience and opportunities to reflect about citizenship.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Overall, teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge and support students' ambitions to achieve as highly as possible. Mutual respect between teachers and students contributes to very effective working relationships. There are rigorous and robust tracking systems which effectively monitor students' learning to ensure they make good and often exceptional progress in most subjects. Students know how well they are doing and what they need to do next in order to improve. Teachers question students well to check what they know and understand. The school is not complacent, determined to ensure that all students enjoy learning and receive the best teaching. Innovative practice is evident in the training and involvement of students in evaluating the quality of lessons. Recent training designed to embed 'assessment for learning' approaches in lessons has led to improvements in teaching which was already good. In the best lessons, teachers are adept at asking searching, open-ended questions to make students think more deeply, extending their understanding and critical-thinking skills. When introducing new concepts, they adapt their teaching and use resources based on a secure knowledge of how their students learn best, to accelerate the pace of learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding and unusually responsive to individuals' needs. There are opportunities for students to make choices about what they learn in every year. In their first year at the school, students experience four different languages from which, on entering Year 8, they choose two. Some courses are completed early in Key Stage 3 leading to the opportunity for students to take GCSEs early or complete them in a shortened time. This, in turn, provides more time to pursue other GCSEs, vocational opportunities, enrichment and AS-level courses. Students study religious studies GCSE in Key Stage 4 in a reduced time span and opportunities to discuss religious issues are mapped across subjects in the sixth form.

A particular strength is mathematics, reflecting the school's specialist status. Students take Key Stage 3 tests a year early in mathematics and in Year 11, a significant number take AS-level mathematics instead of GCSE. The recent successful inclusion of the International Baccalaureate in the sixth form curriculum has led to a broadening of provision. There is a well-organised programme of work-related learning and experience which prepares students well for their future economic well-being. Good participation in a range of externally accredited activities, together with links to external partners, help students to develop their cultural and political awareness as well as to gain a clear understanding of citizenship issues. The school has achieved 'Artsmark Gold' accreditation, reflecting the high quality of arts education in the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care, guidance and support provided for all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are outstanding. Excellent links with local primary schools ensure that students settle quickly when they first arrive. Students travel from a wide geographical area and the tutor groups are structured to enable students to successfully make friends with others living near them. There is a wide range of effective strategies to provide pastoral support, including peer support by trained sixth formers. Students' academic progress is monitored very well, achievement being assessed several times during the year by both subject teachers and tutors. Students know what they need to do to reach particular levels or grades. The arrangements for health and safety generally are good and child protection procedures are secure.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school is outstandingly well led and managed. The headteacher, the strategic team and middle managers work very effectively together to create an environment in which the whole person is valued and nurtured. School managers are given considerable autonomy and are encouraged to take initiative. Governors work very effectively as a 'critical friend' and embrace their responsibilities well. Equal opportunities underpin the ethos and the rare issues that arise are effectively addressed. There is a sharp focus on personalised learning to enable students to reach the highest academic standards as well as celebrating other forms of effort and achievement.

The school knows its strengths and priorities for improvement very well. Performance data is used particularly effectively both to assess the performance of subjects and to monitor and improve the progress of individual students. Thorough and comprehensive reporting provides managers and governors with a clear picture of areas that need to improve. The lesson observation programme is rigorous, accurate and provides clear indications of what teachers need to do to improve. Targets are set annually for teachers and departments, using examination results and value-added information.

There are well-established links with neighbouring schools and the local college. As the lead school in the Leading Edge Partnership Programme, teachers and managers provide in-service training for teachers in the locality. Lessons in mathematics and information and communication technology are provided for seven local primary schools and support for French in six. The school is an active partner in two West Kent and Tonbridge Learning Federations. Staff are very well qualified and are able to access a wide range of professional development opportunities. Whilst some accommodation, such as the design and technology building, is of a good standard, most buildings are of poor quality and need to be replaced.

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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	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

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	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
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

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?	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.

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	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
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

8 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Tonbridge Grammar School, Deakin Leas, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 2JR

We enjoyed visiting your school recently to inspect it. Thank you for making us feel welcome and for talking to us so frankly. We have now written our report and hope some of you will want to read it; but this letter is addressed specifically to you and sums up what we think of Tonbridge Grammar School.

We think your school is outstanding, with excellent potential to become even better. This is a tribute to the leadership of Mrs Joyce and her strategic team, and to the dedication and passion of your teachers; but it is also a testament to your own avid appetite to learn and experience new ideas. It is because you all work so well together that most of you make excellent progress and reach very high standards in your exams and tests. The school enters you for exams when the time is right for you, rather than being hidebound by convention. Teachers strive to develop all your skills and abilities and we are also impressed at how many of you take part in other activities.

You give your time and effort generously to the benefit of others. You are also given and you take a lot of responsibility in your school. The improvement we are asking the school to make is in helping you understand and know more about other cultures and social groups in this country.

I hope you continue to get as much as you can out of your time at Tonbridge Grammar School.

Good luck with your work.

Sean Hanan HMI Lead inspector